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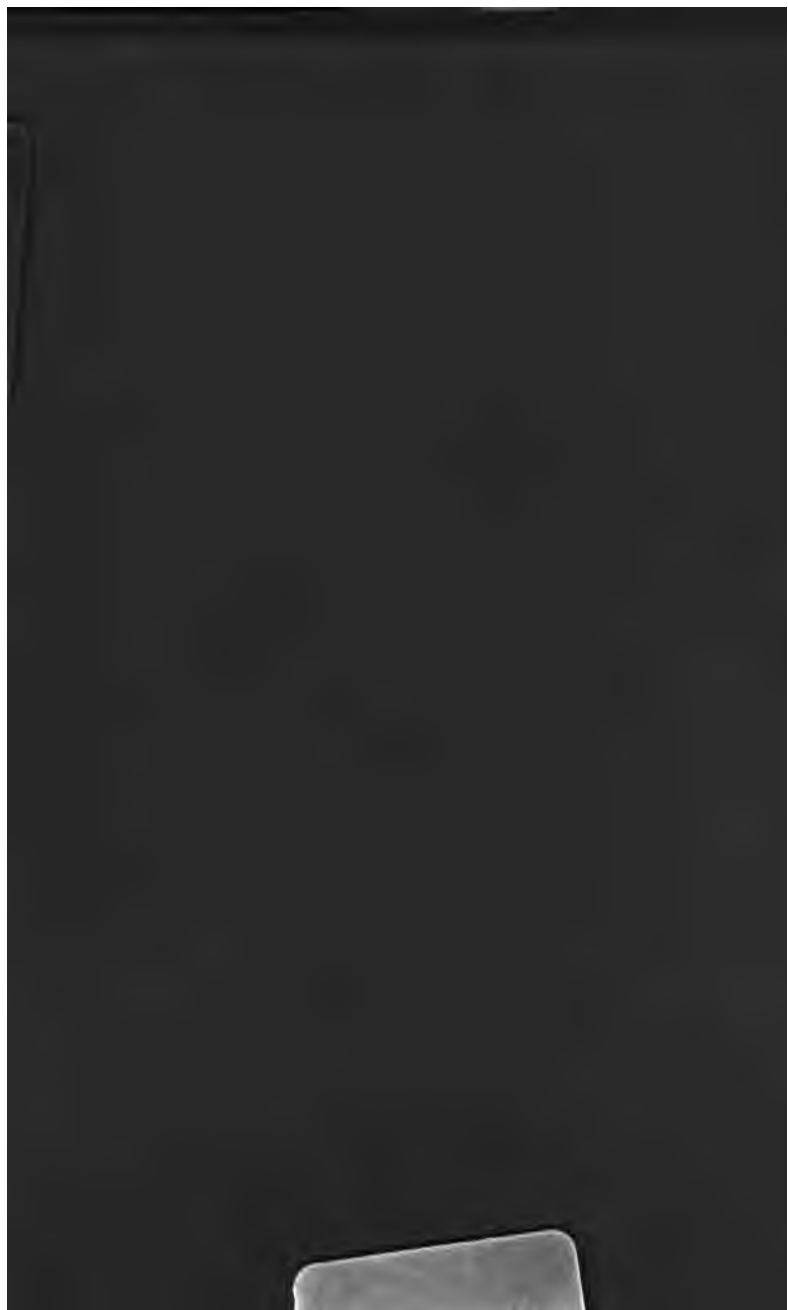
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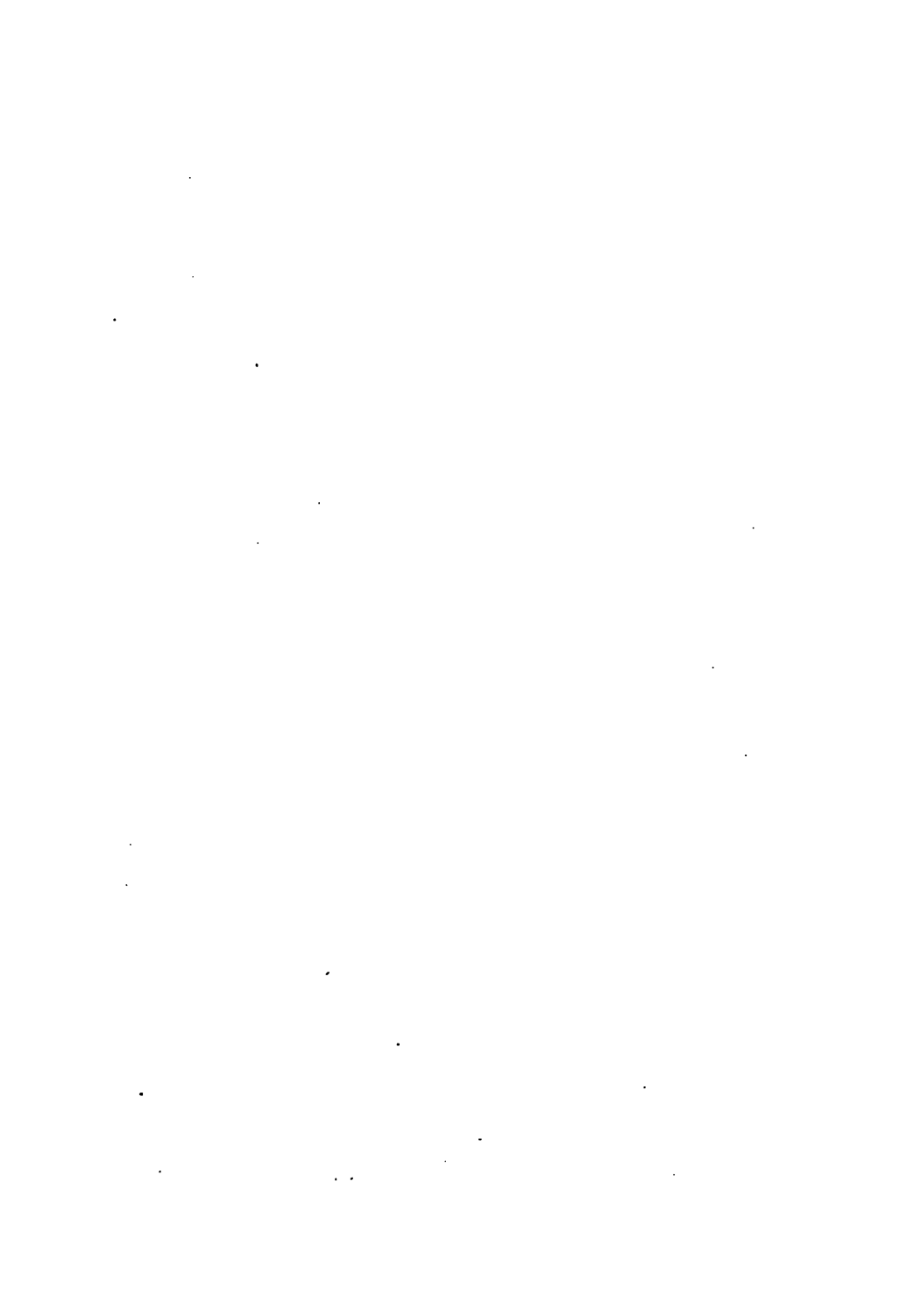
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BIBLE LIVES
AND
BIBLE LESSONS







BIBLE LIVES AND BIBLE LESSONS;

OR,

Gleanings from the Book of Genesis.

BY THE

REV. DAVID A. DOUDNEY,

Incumbent of St. Luke's, Redminster, Bristol;

AUTHOR OF "HEART-BREATHINGS," "MUSINGS," "SYMPATHY,"
ETC.

"WHO TEACHETH LIKE HIM?"—Job xxxvi. 22.

"WHATSOEVER THINGS WERE WRITTEN AFORETIME WERE WRITTEN FOR OUR LEARNING,
THAT WE THROUGH PATIENCE AND COMFORT OF THE SCRIPTURES MIGHT HAVE HOPE."—
Rom. xv. 4.

"* * * NOT IN THE WORDS WHICH MAN'S WISDOM TEACHETH, BUT WHICH THE HOLY GHOST
TEACHETH; COMPARING SPIRITUAL THINGS WITH SPIRITUAL."—1 Cor. ii. 13.

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TO HIS
BELOVED FRIEND AND BROTHER IN THE LORD,

JOSEPH BOOBBYER, ESQ.,

This Volume

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED,
AS A SMALL TOKEN OF GRATEFUL REGARD
FOR HIS REPEATED PROOFS OF
PRACTICAL INTEREST IN THE WORK WHEREUNTO
THE AUTHOR HAS BEEN
CALLED.

P R E F A C E.

THE title of this little volume expresses, as far as a title can express, its character. The object of the author has been to seek, under God, to fix the truths inseparably connected with Old Testament saints upon the attention of the reader, by analyzing the heart and appealing to the conscience. If God condescends to bless, such means are calculated to arrest the mind, and so to impress the truths of God upon the heart, as to defy all the sophistries of men, and the subterfuges of Satan, to uproot the same. "As in water face answereth to face, so doth the heart of man to man." Hence home-and-heart-truths, as exhibited in the word of God, in connexion with His Divine

leadings and teachings, gain a most powerful, irresistible, and imperishable hold, wheresoever experienced and applied by God the Holy Ghost. And such as are thus taught and blessed of God, feel the force and beauty of the divine declaration, that "no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation: for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;" and again, "Whatsoever was written aforetime was written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

Moreover, in these truth-despising days, it is desired the this little volume should prove to be a simple testimony for God; and that parents may hand it down to their children, as illustrative of the important saying of the venerable JOHN NEWTON, "Experience is the key with which to unlock many of the mysteries of Scripture." What, as the apostle John says, those have "heard," and "seen," and "handled" of the word of life, is too precious, and too deeply imbedded

in the heart, to be surrendered. "To the word and to the testimony," say they; "if a man speak not according to these, it is because he has no light in him."

The book has been written under circumstances of deep anxiety and much domestic solicitude. Whilst the MS. was in progress, a precious child, of fifteen years of age, was called away to her everlasting rest. Both prior and subsequently to her death, the author was intensely anxious about the issue of the severe illness of three other beloved children. Within these pages, therefore, the writer was enabled, with some degree of hopeful relief, to pour out the anguish of his heart before the Lord, in immediate connexion with the lessons taught by Bible lives.

That the truths here embodied, and the lessons suggested by Bible lives, may be savingly inculcated upon many a reader's mind, is the author's ardent prayer. In these last days, may this humble volume be a simple means, in the hand of God, of leading precious souls, not only to "read, mark, learn," but also to "*inwardly digest*" the blessed

truths of God, as so richly and graciously presented in His own holy word; and, realizing the power and the preciousness of it in their own souls, may they exclaim, in spite of all that Satan may suggest, or ungodly men say, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart."

BEDMINSTER, BRISTOL,

March 8, 1864.

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BIBLE LIVES AND BIBLE LESSONS.



CHAPTER I.

THE LATTER DAYS—OUR LORD'S AND HIS APOSTLES' TESTIMONIES
CONCERNING THE SIGNS AND TOKENS THAT SHOULD DENOTE
THEIR APPROACH—THE DISPUTANTS OF MOSES CLEARLY FORE-
SHOWN—THE VERACITY OF GOD'S BLESSED WORD RATIFIED AND
CONFIRMED BY THEIR APPEARANCE—THE FEARFUL DESTRUCTION
THAT SHALL BEFAL THE UNRIGHTEOUS—THE GREAT DEFICIENCY :
LACK OF THE SPIRIT.

AMONG the many cautions and admonitions which our blessed Lord was pleased to give, in the days of His flesh, was what should happen in the latter times. "Nation," said He, "shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." Again He declared, "Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end shall be saved." Again, as though the Lord would enforce the admonition with the greater weight and solemnity, He expresses Himself almost in the same

words, "There shall arise false Christs and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before." Thus would He prepare them, so that when these things came to pass, they might not be taken by surprise. The admonition, as given by St. Mark, is even more emphatic than that by the evangelist Matthew; for in the former Christ is reported as saying, "*But take ye heed*: behold, I have foretold you all things."

The Apostle Paul, under the teaching of the Holy Ghost, writes to the Thessalonians with much solemnity and holy concern respecting what shall come to pass in the last days. "Now we beseech you, brethren," he says, in the opening of the second chapter of his second epistle to the Thessalonians, "by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Remember ye not that when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth, that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth

already work, only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Equally solemn is the Apostle's testimony, as addressed to his son Timothy, where, in the opening of the third chapter of his second epistle, he says, "This know, also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

And then, in the next chapter of the same epistle, the Apostle adds: "Preach the word; be instant in

season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

Under the instruction of the self-same gracious Teacher, God the Holy Ghost, the Apostle Peter arrives at conclusions respecting the latter day equally solemn and momentous; for, having at the close of the first chapter of his second epistle, declared that "no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation; for the prophecy came not," says he, "in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," he proceeds, in the opening of his second chapter, to say, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not."

The Apostle Jude, moreover, writes in a similar strain; for, speaking of what existed even in his day, as a reason why the brethren to whom he wrote should

“earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints,” he says, “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.” Speaking of all such, he says: “These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.” .

He then, in spite of such as would ultimately rise up to dispute the genuineness and authenticity of the books of Moses, testifies to the fact, that “Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved,” adds the Apostle, “remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk

after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, *having not the Spirit.*”

Reader, here is the secret—here the key to the whole mystery—“having not the Spirit;” and most emphatically is it declared, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.”

CHAPTER II.

OUR OWN TIMES FURTHER CONSIDERED—MANIFOLD TOKENS OF THE
LAST DAYS—SUPINENESS AND INDIFFERENCE OF MEN—FURTHER
TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PETER CONCERNING MEN'S IN-
CREDULITY—JEHOVAH'S PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING—THE
DAY OF THE LORD: ITS SUDDENNESS AND SOLEMNITY—ST.
PAUL'S ADMONITION—MEN'S EFFORTS TO UNDERMINE THE WORD
OF GOD A CONFIRMATION OF THAT WORD.

IN the previous chapter, for an express reason, we quoted at length both the testimony of our Lord Himself and that of His disciples. We did so in order that no one who reads his Bible with interest and attention should be either astonished or alarmed at what we are called to witness in the days in which we live. Most unquestionably that state of things to which our Lord and His disciples alluded, in the Scriptures quoted, have in very deed come to pass. Such men *have* arisen, such "damnable heresies *are* brought in." Scarcely one, if any, of the many marks indicating the latter times, is wanting. The openings and the developments of each day go to confirm and ratify the fact, that the last days have set in upon us.

The thoughtlessness, and the supineness, and the indifference of men, so far from confuting the truth,

only establish it. The Apostle Peter clearly fore-shows this, for he says, in the last chapter of his second epistle, "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. "But, beloved," continues the Apostle, "be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

Thus, reader, by the united testimonies which we have quoted, we are forewarned and admonished as to what would most certainly indicate the approach of the latter days; and, in regard to that solemn state of things to which he had alluded, well does

the Apostle add, "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

From the various passages which we have quoted, it will be clear to every spiritual reader, that the signs of the times, and the vigorous efforts which men are making to undermine the word of God, is only a confirmation—yea, a solemn but most truthful exponent—of that word. Were such men and such means wanting, in so far as the Scriptures made reference to them, would such portions be untrue.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT IS OUR POSITION?—SALVATION ALL OF GRACE, NOT OF WORKS
—THE TEACHING OF THE HEART, THE PIVOT UPON WHICH PERSONAL
SALVATION TURNS—NO SERVICE ACCEPTABLE IN WHICH THE HEART IS
NOT ENGAGED—JEHOVAH'S PROMISE TO HIS PEOPLE OF "A HEART TO
KNOW HIM"—SOLOMON'S, ISAIAH'S, JOEL'S TESTIMONY ABOUT THE
HEART—JEHOVAH'S CONDESCENSION IN DWELLING WITH THE LOWLY
IN HEART—HIS HEALING THE BROKEN IN HEART—THE BEATITUDES:
THEIR GRAND FEATURE, THE HEART.

WITH the facts introduced in the preceding chapters, it becomes a matter of inquiry, What is the lesson which is thus instrumentally set before us? We answer, a careful investigation upon Scripture grounds of the Lord's method of dealing with His people. It behoves us to seek to ascertain the Lord's special and gracious way of enlightening and instructing and comforting such poor and felt-needy sinners as He is pleased mercifully and sovereignly to take in hand.

Those who are the subjects of His quickening power; whom He is pleased to "translate from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son," become the heartfelt recipients of rich and free and sovereign grace. Nay, their felt spiritual poverty

and need is one of the first signs and tokens of that grace, according to the words of the poet :

“ Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream ;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him :
This He gives you ;
’Tis the Spirit’s rising beam.”

This grace operates upon them in a total distinctiveness from every thing appertaining to creature-merit or creature-power. It is precisely as the Apostle laid down the matter before his Ephesian brethren : “ By grace are ye saved, through faith ; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God : not of works, lest any man should boast : ” or, in writing to his son Titus, “ Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.”

We would lay special stress upon that word “*heart-felt*,” for upon this pivot turns the whole economy of salvation as far as the personal participation of it is concerned. If the *heart* be not right, nothing is right. No mere superficial enlightenment—no intellectual apprehension—no simple defining of doctrine, will suffice : it must be, absolutely and indispensably, a *heart-reception* of the truth as it is in Jesus.

This will appear by a careful consideration of the Scriptures which we are about to quote.

When our Lord was upon earth, we read of one coming unto Him, and saying, “ Master, what shall

I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt *love the Lord thy God with all thine heart*, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And He said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live."

Hence we find that the heart, being the seat of love, must be the source whence proceeds obedience. If the heart be not right, the service, such as it is, must be deficient. It can only be servile, prompted by fear, yielded from a mere sense of duty, and by no means be the fruit of love. And we are told, that

"God abhors the sacrifice
Where not *the heart* is found."

It was a discovery of this sad deficiency in Simon Magus, that led Peter to say to him, in answer to his request, upon the offer of money, that he might have the gift of the Holy Ghost, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for *thy heart is not right in, the sight of God*" (Acts viii. 20, 21). Again, when Ananias and Sapphira had sought to deceive the Apostle by appearing to give the whole proceeds of the possessions they had sold, Peter said, "Ananias, why hath Satan filled *thine heart* to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the

land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in *thine heart*? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God" (Acts v. 3, 4).

In proof of the vast importance and indispensable necessity of the heart being right with God, the Lord says, by the prophet Jeremiah, "I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord." And again, in the prophet Ezekiel, He declares, "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you: and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

In the 16th chapter of the Acts and the 14th verse, we read, the Lord opened the heart of Lydia, "that she attended to the things spoken by Paul."

Herein we see both the Giver and the gift; and, as the Giver was so great, the gift must necessarily be worthy of Himself.

So deeply did the Psalmist feel the importance of this gift of a new heart, that we hear him exclaiming, in the 51st Psalm, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Again, in the same Psalm, he says, "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom." "The sacrifices of God," he says, again, "are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not

despise." Moreover, in proof of how deeply he felt upon this subject, he pleads in the 139th Psalm, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

In Proverbs iv. 23, we have these remarkable words, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

In Joel ii. 13, we meet with this solemn injunction, "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil."

In Isaiah lvii. 15, we have this gracious declaration: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

As a further proof of the Lord's gracious interest in a poor self-condemned and repentant sinner, we read in the 147th Psalm, that "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

In the Beatitudes, as given in the 5th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, we have these most encouraging words:—

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their's is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek ; for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peace-makers : for they shall be called the children of God.”

Herein we see the blessing is pronounced upon those, and those only, whose *hearts* are rightly and duly influenced.

As with the prophets, so with Christ and His apostles, their aim was—the *heart* and *conscience*.

CHAPTER IV.

MERE PROFESSION VAIN—THE TREE KNOWN BY ITS FRUITS—JESUS AND THE WOMAN OF SAMARIA—THE APOSTLE'S PLEA FOR CHARITY, OR LOVE—NEW-CREATURESHIP—THE GROUNDWORK OF DIVINE FELLOWSHIP—ADAM AND HIS HEART—LESSONS UPON DIVINE FORBEARANCE, DIVINE MERCY, DIVINE LOVE—PARADISE—THE ENTRANCE OF SIN—JEHOVAH'S ADDRESS TO THE SERPENT, TO THE WOMAN, TO ADAM—THE FIRST PROMISE—THE BIRTH OF FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE—THE GROUND CURSED—CHRIST THE CURSE-BEARER—WHAT WOULD ADAM HAVE BEEN WITHOUT THE PROMISE OF A SEED THROUGH WHICH HE SHOULD BE SAVED?—BANISHED FROM THE GARDEN, BUT BLESSED WITHAL—FAITH CENTRING IN CHRIST THE PROMISE SEED—HOPE IN THE GOD OF ALL GRACE, A LIVING PRINCIPLE IN ALL OLD TESTAMENT BELIEVERS.

IN the preceding chapter we insisted upon the absolute and indispensable necessity of the heart and conscience being influenced and operated upon by divine grace. We have endeavoured to show from Scripture, that all mere externals in religion are vain; if they are substituted for *heart-work*, they are worse than vain. Mere morality or outward rectitude and consistency may pass current among men; but it weighs not a feather's weight in the balances of the sanctuary. "Either make the tree good and his fruit good," said our Lord, "or else make the tree

corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit." "A good man out of the good treasure of the *heart* bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. xii. 35). Again, in His conversation with the woman of Samaria, Jesus said, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in *spirit* and in *truth*: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in *spirit* and in *truth*."

The Apostle, moreover, in the 13th chapter of his first epistle to the Corinthians, and first three verses, says: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [that is, love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Again, in enforcing this *heart-work* for which we contend—and which, indeed, is to be the sum and substance of this book—he says (Gal. v. 6), "In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but *faith which worketh by love*." As much as to say, it matters not what my name or profession may be externally, but whether I am *born again*; for, says the same Apostle, in the 5th chapter of the 2nd of Corin-

thians, and 17th verse, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

With the doctrine, therefore, of the new birth unto righteousness so clearly and forcibly laid down in the word of God, we shall proceed to show by examples from the self-same word, what is the nature and what the effects of that Divine intercourse which goes on between God and the souls of His redeemed. We shall show, upon the ground of what they have "*seen* and *heard*," what the character of that "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" is which they are permitted and privileged to realize and enjoy. And, inasmuch as the early books of the Old Testament Scriptures are those which are more especially assailed by men who "have not the Spirit," and who are, consequently, destitute of all vital godliness, it is to those identical Scriptures we shall call the reader's attention; and to the examples which they afford we purpose to confine ourselves.

Our key-note, we beg to remind the reader, is *Experience, or heart-work.*

We shall begin, therefore, where God begins—with Adam, and shall contemplate him as called to learn his first heart-lessons in Divine forbearance, Divine mercy, Divine love.

Falling as do the facts connected with the transgression of our first parents so early in the Scriptures, we are so much the sooner introduced to a cheering and blessed discovery of the practical working of the

Lord's grace and mercy towards the fallen sons and daughters of Adam.

Mercy—that sweet *mercy* in which Jehovah “delighteth”—was proclaimed in Eden, for scarcely had our first parents sinned, when we read, that “they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” Most significant was this, to teach us thus early the tenderness and the forbearance of Jehovah. We are told, moreover, that “Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.” A sorry and a shallow shelter this. “And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?” Did not Jehovah know where he was? Was it necessary for Him to ask? Why, then, did He put the question, but for the purpose of thus manifesting His tender pity and forbearance in connection with the ratification of His justice and His truth? “I heard Thy voice in the garden,” said Adam, “and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.”

Now all these inquiries upon the part of Jehovah tend to show forth, in the highest degree, the boundless sympathies of His loving heart; for, considering His infinite purity, His divine veracity, and His omnipotent power, but for His tenderness and com-

passion, He would instantaneously have destroyed the creature He had made.

The replies of Adam painfully exhibited, moreover, the rapid progress of sin as well as the dreadful nature of iniquity. So recently as Adam had rejoiced and revelled with rapturous delight and gratitude in the gift of an Eve, he as it were throws back this inestimable boon in Jehovah's face, and indirectly charges Him with being the cause of his transgression.

Still exercising the same astounding forbearance and longsuffering, Jehovah proceeds to address the woman. Tenderly does He talk with her. "What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." It is questionable whether Eve recognized (or would appear to do so, at least) Satan as the prime mover in the matter of the temptation under which she had fallen. It was upon the serpent she laid the blame; and, in doing so, followed the evil example of her husband, in indirectly charging home upon God the reason she had transgressed. This was indeed adding sin to sin, and, both in herself and her husband, was the first exhibition of that *self-justification* which from that time to the present has been so sad a token of the fall.

"And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between

thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed : it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

Thus we see that before the Lord pronounced upon Adam the evil that was to befall him and his posterity, He cursed the serpent, and, in doing so, declared that which should at once raise His poor fallen creature to a hope of escape from the dreadful consequences which by sin he had entailed upon himself and his posterity. Ere yet Adam realized all the baneful effects of disobedience, a promise was proclaimed in his hearing. With the revelation that the woman who was given to him as a helpmeet was to conceive *seed*, was the revelation also that she was to bring forth a *Saviour*. Here was the first announcement of a promise which was instrumentally to comfort and to sustain every poor sensible sinner down to the latest period of time. It was that which was to cheer the drooping heart amid all the distressing circumstances which were the immediate consequence of transgression.

Another striking evidence of Jehovah's forbearance and mercy is given in the very terms in which He expressed His displeasure.

“Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception : in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children ; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou

shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat of the herb of the field: in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

Now observe, dear reader, that however humiliating and afflictive the language in which Jehovah expressed His indignation, still *the curse* was not literally and absolutely pronounced upon *man*, but upon the *serpent*. And even after Cain had slain his brother Abel, the Lord said to him, as his punishment, "And now art thou cursed *from the earth*, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand."

From these facts, it would seem as though the Lord, greatly as man had sinned, was loath to pronounce a curse upon him as from Himself. But there *was* a curse which He had in reserve; and, seldom as the term is used in Scripture, it is employed in regard to Jehovah's righteous One—His only-begotten, His dearly-beloved Son; for, in the early proclamation of His mind to Israel, the Lord says (in the last two verses of the 21st of Deuteronomy), "And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is *accursed*

of God.”) The Apostle, in after-day, makes distinct reference to this passage; for, in Gal. iii. 13, he says, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” The word *curse* or *cursed* is rarely used throughout the Scriptures: a very early mention of the term is in the passage which we have just quoted from the book of Deuteronomy; where the Lord Jehovah most certainly had an eye to the person of Christ, who from eternity was ordained as the Church’s Surety and Substitute.

Of this glorious Redeemer and His work the Apostle Peter spoke, when he said, in vindication of Him, upon the day of Pentecost, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it” (Acts ii. 23, 24).

In order that we may in some feeble measure conceive what would have been the anguish of Adam and Eve, and how great the suspense (to use the very mildest term) into which they had been plunged; we would, for a moment, imagine them to have been expelled from Eden without the promise of that seed through which and by which they were to be saved.

For a moment, we say, we will omit the gracious assurance given in the 15th verse, and proceed to the three last verses of the 3rd chapter of the book of

Genesis, "And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever; therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

Now, under such circumstances, how dreadful would have been the feelings of both Adam and his wife. Banished from the garden; debarred at once from all those peculiar privileges with which they had been favoured. No sight of new communings with their Creator now. A portentous gloom and a painful deathliness overshadow and enshroud all. Creation for the first time assumes its sable mantle. The human breast heaves its first sigh—the heart its first throb—the eye emits its first tear. *Care* (an utter stranger until now) seats himself for the first time o'er the human brow; *Fear* proclaims himself the rightful tenant of the human breast; *Gloom* avows himself as near of kin to both. And it would appear as though Adam and his helpmeet, once excluded from their loved paradise, were being hurled on and on to irremediable destruction and despair. But no; agonising as is their position, and though great—inconceivably so—their loss, they have that now which they had not before, a promise, and that, too, of a seed by which they should be rescued, re-

deemed, restored. Light beamed upon that promise soon as it fell from their Maker's lips; and by it they were raised to hope, expectancy, and, even now, a joy and satisfaction to which even 'mid the bliss of paradise they had heretofore been strangers. They saw in vision Him who in after-day should take their nature, and, in that very nature, serve and suffer—bleed and die. By Him atonement for transgression should be made; by Him redemption come; by Him a re-admission, not to paradise alone, but to a seat upon His throne in heights of highest glory. Hence Eden (though its sun is veiled, and a gloominess overspreads its beauties) becomes the birthplace of Faith and Hope and Love. Love did exist before, but not as now. Then it centred in Jehovah as Creator only, but now as Redeemer also, for already was the glory of that truth unfolding, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John iii. 16). Of Adam's having, by faith, an insight into redemption, there can be no question; for not only had he heard the declaration, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, but a sacrifice had subsequently been made, a victim had been slain; for we read, "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of *skins*, and clothed them." There was the nature of justification, or the mode by which Jehovah could be just and yet the Justifier, practically expounded. By blood atonement could be made; by the covering of the

victim slain, a righteousness imputed to or counted as that personally of the redeemed.

The faith and hope thus grounded on the Saviour's substitution—His blood and righteousness—supported Adam and the partner of his woes. This faith, this hope, dispelled in measure that intensity of gloom and sadness which sin had introduced. The self-same faith and hope animated also each privileged possessor. By the power thereof, they beheld in type and shadow Him who "once in the end of the world" should appear, "to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

CHAPTER V.

DIVINE UNFOLDINGS OF MERCY—ABEL'S OFFERING EXPRESSIVE OF HIS FAITH IN CHRIST AS THE REDEEMER—THE VEIN OF SPIRITUAL LIFE RUNNING THROUGH ENOCH AND NOAH, BUT THE FULLER DEVELOPMENT THEREOF IN ABRAHAM—HIS CALL FROM THE MIDST OF IDOLATRY—HIS READINESS TO OBEY—SIGNIFICANT RESEMBLANCE OF THE CALL OF ALL GOD'S PEOPLE FROM THEIR STATE BY NATURE OF ALIENATION FROM HIM—ABRAHAM BY NATURE NOT BETTER THAN OTHER MEN—SALVATION WHOLLY BY GRACE—THE APOSTLE'S TESTIMONY THERETO—THE WRITINGS OF MOSES AND PAUL PERFECTLY HARMONIOUS—THE SCHEME OF SALVATION MOST ENCOURAGING TO SUCH AS FEEL THEMSELVES TO BE SINNERS—REPENTANCE THE GIFT OF GOD.

We have considered the circumstances connected with the fall in Eden, and we have seen how even there Adam and his companion in transgression were raised to hope, by the promise of a seed through which they should be saved. Upon that promise was based the loving-kindness and mercy which was treasured up in the heart of Jehovah towards every redeemed sinner. Pity was manifested, and pardon substantially proclaimed, in Eden; but the clearer development and the fuller working out of that Divine pity and compassion was reserved for a somewhat later period. Divine love was opened up to Adam's early offspring, for we read that "the Lord

had respect unto Abel, and to his offering." Abel, in contrast to Cain, had a sight of Christ, by the self-same faith with which Adam had been indulged, and which was then, as it is now, the sovereign gift of Jehovah. This was evidenced by his offering of the firstlings of his flock. Here again was a sacrifice, and the early admission of his convictions that "without the shedding of blood there is no remission." Again we read, at the close of the 4th chapter of Genesis, that "men began to call upon the name of the Lord." Of Enoch it is testified, that he "walked with God, and he was not; for God took him." Noah, too, "found grace in the eyes of the Lord;" and he and his family it was whom God preserved, whilst He destroyed the world with the flood. But, great as was the love displayed in all these characters, it was in Abraham the love was so largely and so blessedly opened out. It was not that Abraham was more loved than were the men of whom we have made mention; but concerning them the testimony was comparatively brief. Whilst to some of them at least the love was for most part to be traced in the *testimony* and the *proclamation*, in Abraham, so emphatically called "the father of the faithful," as though he were to be to the end of time both a pattern and an example of faith, there was the *training* and the *proof*. In him and his eventful career was the opening out of the covenant plan of salvation, as originating in the mercy, love, and grace of Jehovah in His Trinity of Persons.

Now all this will be the more clearly seen, if we

consider what Abraham was, and whence he came. The first that we hear of him is in the 11th of Genesis and 26th verse, where we read, "And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran." Then again we read that "Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah. But Sarai was barren, she had no child. And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai, his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there." Thus we see that Abraham was not only born in an idolatrous country, and surrounded by idolatry, but was doubtless originally an idolator himself. Abraham, humanly, was not better than other men. He descended from a guilty stock. Sin, when it entered by the disobedience of Adam, contaminated the whole human family. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that *all* have sinned" (Rom. v. 12). "*All* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. iii. 23). "There is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. iii. 10). Whence was it, then, that there came any change in Abraham? How was it that he left his idolatrous country, and what induced him to separate himself from his own people? The answer is given in the opening of the 12th chapter of Genesis: "Now the

Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee." There was the secret. This, and this alone, was what led to the change in Abraham. It was the fact that *the Lord* had spoken unto him. But for this, Abraham would have remained where he was, and what he was. He would have neither seen nor cared for his condition. Though bound, he would have embraced his bonds, and sought to have bound them tighter.

The same truth applies to men universally. If there come a change in them, that change is wholly and solely of God. It does not in the least wise originate in man. As well could the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots, as those do good that are accustomed to do evil (Jer. xiii. 23). All vitality in religion is identified with the *new-birth*; hence the Lord said, in His conversation with Nicodemus, as given in the 3rd chapter of John, "Verily, verily I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And, so far from man of himself having aught to do with this new-birth, or new creatureship, it would be an easier matter (if a comparison may be used) for him to beget himself naturally than spiritually.

In the 11th of Ecclesiastes, and 5th verse, we read, "As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child; even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all." From the merely natural the Lord Christ proceeds to that which is strictly

spiritual : hence He says to Nicodemus, still further, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

Well is it for the reader—especially in these days of avowed infidelity, formalism, pharisaism, and superstition—to be well versed in these *essential truths*. They have to do, indispensably, with the *fundamentals* of our most holy faith. If we are wrong upon the necessity and the nature of the new-birth, we are wrong altogether.

Another truth we would insist upon in regard to Abraham, and which is verified and confirmed in every soul that is quickened by the Holy Ghost from a death in trespasses and sins : it is this ; that it was not on account of any goodness seen by God in Abraham, either prospectively or retrospectively, that induced Him to exercise His love and mercy towards him. It was solely of His sovereign good will and pleasure. He did it because He chose to do it. Precisely upon the same principle as that on which the Apostle Paul greeted the Ephesians, when he said, "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ; and were by nature the children of wrath,

even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. ii. 1—9).

Such was the Apostle's testimony with respect to the nature of salvation, and the way by which alone a sinner could be justified and accepted of God. How satisfactory is the concurrence between the fact recorded as to the belief of Abraham (of whom it is said that "he believed God, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness") and the faith for which the Apostle ever seeks to contend. Thus the writings of Moses and the epistles of Paul (though penned at such remote intervals, and under such very different circumstances) are in perfect harmony one with the other.

The grand Gospel scheme of salvation, moreover, as based upon these principles, becomes so much more adapted to man as a fallen sinner, and so much more acceptable to his otherwise helpless and hopeless condition. As long as he seeks to commend himself to God by any doings of his own, or as long as he seeks to have the mastery over himself, in regard to what he sees and feels within himself, and which his conscience tells him is contrary to the purity of a holy

God, and adverse to the requirements of His most righteous law, so long will he meet with nothing but disappointment. In *Christ*, and *Christ alone*, is to be found that which he seeks in vain to find in himself. Yea, if Jehovah sought to exhibit mercy when, and only when; the sinner showed sorrow, salvation were a hopeless matter, and mankind at large were for ever undone. How forcibly was this fact revealed in Eden; for where was there the slightest betrayal of repentance upon the part either of Adam or Eve? *Shame* there was, but no *sorrow*; *guilt*, but not a particle of *grace*; there was *light*, as reflected by conscience, but *love* was wholly void. Consequently, this sorrow, this grace, this love, must come from a source altogether independent of the creature: that source, that fountain, that spring, was *God Himself!* Hence we hear the Apostle Peter testify in Jerusalem to this great fact, "Him (that is, the Lord Jesus Christ) hath God exalted with His right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts v. 31).

CHAPTER VI.

THE LORD'S DEALINGS WITH ABRAHAM IN PERFECT ACCORDANCE
WITH HIS DEALINGS WITH ALL HIS PEOPLE—THEIR CALL TO
COME OUT FROM THE WORLD—THE PROMISES WHICH ARE
ANNEXED THERETO—JESU'S ENCOURAGING WORDS—THE NEW
TESTAMENT CONFIRMING THE OLD—THE MARTYRED STEPHEN'S
TESTIMONY—SACRIFICES FOR GOD AND HIS TRUTH ABUNDANTLY
RECOMPENSED—APPEAL TO THE READER—FURTHER MOVEMENTS
OF ABRAHAM—HIS PITCHING BETWEEN BETHEL AND HAI—
ABRAHAM'S TRIAL—HIS WANT OF FAITH—INDULGENCES CRITICAL
—MISTAKEN STEPS OF BELIEVERS—ABRAHAM'S GOING DOWN
INTO EGYPT—A WAITING FAITH A GOD-HONOURING FAITH.

WE have already intimated that the nature and blessedness of salvation were most strikingly opened out in regard to Jehovah's dealings with Abraham. Moreover, the very character of the Lord's command to Abraham is precisely that which He enjoins upon every poor sinner whom the Lord the Spirit is pleased condescendingly and graciously to take in hand. It was God's first work, as to manifestation, with Abraham ; so it is His first work, manifestively, with all His people. It was "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house," with Abraham ; and it is, as regards His people, whom He finds, as He did Israel of old, in a

desert land, in a waste howling wilderness, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty; for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him" (Psalm xlv. 10, 11). "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah lv. 7).

Again, the Lord annexed a promise to His exhortation to Abraham: "And I will make of thee," said He, "a great nation; and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The Lord does likewise connect a promise with His precepts: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his

stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 24—33). Again, we read that "Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. xix. 28, 29).

In the case of Abraham, we find there was a ready compliance with the command of God. He promptly obeyed His word. Thus it is recorded, "So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him." Special mention is made of this fact twice in the New Testament. In his address to the Jews at Jerusalem, the martyr Stephen says, "Men, brethren,

and fathers, hearken : The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran : and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on : yet He promised him that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child " (Acts vii. 2—5). In the 11th of the Hebrews, and at the 8th verse, we read, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed ; and he went out, not knowing whither he went."

Thus the Lord honoured the faith of Abraham, by having it recorded, ages afterwards, that it should be handed down, both as an example and for encouragement, to the latest period of time.

And sure we are, that where the Lord has given grace to any soul to exercise self-denial, and to come forth from the world, to "take up his cross daily, and to follow Him," there has not only been strength afforded at the time, but a satisfaction and a peace and a comfort, which no human language can express or heart conceive. Invariably does the Lord make up all that is surrendered for Him. His communications are such as to allow no room whatever for

regrets or repining. It is unbounded consolation, given, it may be, for earthly privation; and from the depths of his heart the tried one can sing—

“Boast not, ye sons of earth,
Nor look with scornful eyes;
Above your *highest mirth*,
My *saddest hours* I prize:
For, though my cup seems fill’d with gall,
A something secret sweetens all.”

Yes, reader, indeed it is so. Permit us to ask, have *you* found it to be the case? Have *you* had the rich personal experience of it? Was the Lord pleased to arrest you in your mad career, when you were afar off by wicked works, and going rapidly on the downward road to destruction? Did He stay you with His invisible but omnipotent hand? By disappointment, it may be, or loss or cross; by sickness or bereavement, or possibly by the total failure of pleasure in this or that pursuit wherein you were wont aforetime to realize so much satisfaction. And, though your pathway has been so totally changed, and you are now called to pursue a course so utterly at variance with all your preconceived thoughts and purposes, yet can you not say, that “the peace of God” is a peace that “passeth all understanding, that keepeth the heart and mind by Christ Jesus?” And, if it be so now, under present circumstances, the subject of a body of sin and death, and compassed about by trial and affliction, what will it be when you are delivered from “the burden of the flesh, and are in joy and felicity,” in the

immediate presence of Him whom you now see but as through a glass darkly ?

“ There shall you see, and hear, and know,
All you desir'd or wish'd below ;
And every power find sweet employ
In that eternal world of joy.”

We read, further, of the Lord's confirming the steps of Abraham, and showing that he was right in his movements, inasmuch as it is said, that “ the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land : and there,” recognizing as he did the goodwill and pleasure of the Lord, “ builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.” There he worshipped the Lord ; there he avowedly testified his holy determination to serve the Lord ; there he offered prayer and praise ; there he gave the first outward proof of his belief in Him who, in the fulness of time, was to be both the altar and the sacrifice. “ And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east ; and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord ;” so that, wherever he went, he was resolved to identify himself with the Lord, and with His great and glorious cause. His language, practically, was, “ As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord ” (Joshua xxiv. 15). How significant, moreover, the very name of the position Abraham took up. He “ pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east.” Bethel signifies the house of God, and Hai, mass or

heap. Thus, on the one hand, he looked towards the house of God, realizing in his contemplations the goodwill and favour of Him who dwelt in the bush, and who afterwards declared that His heart and His eye should be upon his house continually. On the other hand, Abraham looked towards Hai, and by its very name was reminded of that "mass" of mercies, that "heap" of blessings, which the Lord Jehovah was day by day bestowing upon him.

Reader, it is well for us when by faith we can pitch our tent, as strangers and pilgrims, between Bethel and Hai; and well, whilst receiving so continuously and uninterruptedly of the blessings of His house, even of His holy temple, that we should set up our Hais, or "heaps," in token of our grateful recognition and remembrance of those mercies.

But a trial awaited Abraham, as trials commonly await those who have received special favours or peculiar indulgence at the hand of the Lord; for verily faith must be tried. Abraham's faith was about to be exercised in an exceedingly critical way. "There was a famine in the land;" and, in consequence, "Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land." Whether Abraham in this matter of going down into Egypt sought specially counsel of the Lord, or whether he was influenced by merely passing circumstances, we know not; but certain it is, that the step involved him in perplexity and trouble.

The people of God are never in so much danger, abstractedly considered, as when they have had

peculiar indulgence from on high. Then it is that they are so commonly thrown off their guard; then they are so apt to *presume* when it behoves them to *pray*. They misinterpret the Lord's voice in His providence; what they construe into an intimation of the Lord's *promoting*, is in reality nothing more than an indication of the Lord's *proving*. It is the Lord's saying, "Stand still," rather than as at other times His directing to "Go forward." Sure we are that, however a faithful God may overrule circumstances, and bring good out of evil, so that in the issue His people should say, "He hath done *all* things well;" yet this neither gives warrant nor licence for their supposing *every* seemingly plain path is that in which the Lord would have them walk. The Lord's *allowing* His children to do this or that, is one thing; His *approval* is another. He not unfrequently withdraws His presence, and withholds His promises, in order that He may prove His people, and that they, as Hezekiah, might know all that is in their hearts.

Now, however we may differ in our opinion from some great and good men, we question whether Abraham was justified, abstractedly considered, in going down into Egypt. Were there nothing more, we conceive that (to say the least) the subterfuge to which he resorted would indicate this. Men, in their weakness and want of faith, and as the result of their choosing for themselves, and following out the dictates of their own carnal minds, may have to fall back upon such shifts and excuses; but we believe, if there is a steady waiting *for* as well as waiting *upon* the

Lord, all such expedients are unnecessary. God is prepared to defend His own cause, as well as to work out His own purposes. With Him there is no lack of either wisdom or power. To Him and to His dealings there appertains not so much as the shadow of a flaw or a failure. Hence a *waiting* faith is a God-glorifying faith; and assuredly it shall ever be found true, that

“Who *waits* for Thy salvation, Lord,
Shall Thy salvation see.”

CHAPTER VII.

EXAMPLES OF FAITH IN THE THREE HEBREWS—THEIR CALMNESS AND CONFIDENCE IN DANGER—DAVID AND GOLIATH OF GATH—DANIEL AND HIS RELIANCE UPON HIS GOD—THE DIVERSITY OF POSITION AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO FAITH—ABRAHAM'S FEAR AND CARNAL POLICY—ITS REWARD, BUT GOD'S GRACIOUS INTERFERENCE—"MAN'S EXTREMITY GOD'S OPPORTUNITY"—SARAH RESCUED AND RESTORED—APPEAL TO THE READER—NEITHER ABRAHAM, NOR HAS ANY OTHER CREATURE, ROOM FOR BOASTING—DAILY DEBTORS ARE ALL GOD'S CHILDREN TO DIVINE GRACE AND MERCY.

WHAT a remarkable example of the simple confidence and God-honouring faith, for which we pleaded in our last chapter, is given in the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. The image of gold had been set up in the plain of Dura, and a decree made that "whoso fell not down, and worshipped it, should be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace." These three Hebrews heeded not the decree, and, when brought before the king, they, unawed by his rage and fury, listened with the greatest possible composure, whilst he challenged them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the

cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image that I have made, well ; but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace ; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands ?” Then “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace ; and He will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image that thou hast set up.”

Herein we discover two things : first, that the very wrath and fury of the king (because the power of their God was upon them) only possessed these three threatened ones with the greater calmness and composure ; secondly, the blasphemous appeal of Nebuchadnezzar as to who was that God who should deliver them only inspired them with the greater confidence in their gracious covenant and almighty Deliverer. It was with them on this occasion as it was with the stripling David, when the proud Goliath of Gath insulted Jehovah, the God of armies, by saying, “I defy the armies of Israel this day : give me a man, that we may fight together.” Fired with a holy zeal on behalf of Israel and Israel’s God, the stripling exclaims, “What shall be done to the man that killeth this Philistine, and taketh away the reproach from Israel ? for who is this uncircumcised Philistine

that he should defy the armies of the living God?" No fear had hold of David's heart, though a blaspheming giant stood before him, and the Philistine army was drawn up in battle array. Nor did the Hebrews fear, though about to be cast into a burning fiery furnace, heated seven times hotter than it was wont to be heated.

Again, it had been testified of Daniel, by his enemies, that "they should not find any occasion against him, except they found it against him concerning the law of his God." A royal decree was established, at their entreaty, that whosoever should ask a petition of any god or man, for thirty days, save of king Darius, should be cast into a den of lions. "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and *his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem*, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime."

Hence we see in these three totally-different cases how each was indulged with a simple, calm, blessed resting in and upon the omnipotency and the faithfulness of an ever-present God. They knew not fear, because Jehovah had whispered His precious "Fear nots" into their hearts, not vocally, but substantially, in that secret, silent, infusive, fear-assuaging, mind-calming, heart-melting, soul-mellowing way, that no words can express, nor heart conceive, but such as have been richly led into the experience of the same. And how did the Lord, in each of the cases to which we have just adverted, honour the faith He had

bestowed. How was that faith confirmed and established. How clearly did their conduct testify that there needs nought of poor timid, any more than of poor treacherous, human nature, to help the Lord, or to further His wise and loving plans and purposes.

Now let us look at the conduct of Abraham, as differing, in one particular instance, so materially from that pursued by those to whom we have just alluded. "And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou art a fair woman to look upon: therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This is his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive. Say, I pray thee, thou art my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee."

Observe, reader, the issue. "And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman that she was very fair. The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh; and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house." So that, notwithstanding Abraham's policy and seeming foresight, if the course he pursued did not go so far as to endanger his own life, as he had apprehended, it did well-nigh lead to the loss of his wife, as far as *he* was concerned; for, when once a woman was taken into one of those eastern harems, she was virtually a dead woman to all beyond its precincts.

But now we see the Lord's condescending goodness and mercy in regard to Abraham and Sarah. Matters were out of their hands absolutely and entirely. They were separated. They could no longer confer one with the other. The very thing they (or Abraham at least) had apprehended, had in a great degree come to pass. He was deprived of his wife, and her restoration to him was a matter of doubt. As far as appearances went, the case was a hopeless one. Abraham might now well call in question the prudence of his steps into Egypt. Well might he ask himself, "Did I seek counsel of God? Distinctly did the Lord tell me to get out of my own country, and from my kindred, and from my father's house; but did He as distinctly tell me that I was to come down into Egypt? Is *this* the land He promised to show me? Moreover, what if there were a famine where I was when I dwelt between the loved Bethel and Hai, was the Lord at a loss to provide means wherewith to sustain me? 'Was His hand shortened, that it could not save, or His ear heavy, that it could not hear?' Had His providence failed, how then could His promise be fulfilled, 'I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing?' As the Lord had *engaged*, so it was for me to *expect*. 'And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good.' But now I have, as it were, taken matters out of the Lord's hand, and plunged myself into difficulties from which He alone can extricate me."

Such, possibly, was the way in which Abraham

reasoned with himself, and perfectly at a loss was he as to the issue. But in this we see the pitifulness and condescension, as well as the faithfulness, of our God. "Man's extremity has ever been God's opportunity." Where the creature's wisdom ends, our God's wisdom manifestively begins. Where man is powerless, Jehovah is almighty. The creature surrenders, and God undertakes.

We read, "And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues, because of Sarai, Abram's wife." Ah, here was the secret. "The Lord" did it. Who could have foreseen it?—who for a moment have thought of such a way of escape for Sarah, and poor, affrighted, distressed Abraham, as this?

Reader, have you never known anything of the like experience? Human wisdom and human strength have utterly failed. You have been altogether at a loss to know what to do. You could not by any possibility see how succour was to come. Nought but failure—yea, absolute destruction—has threatened you. The case has appeared as hopeless as you have felt helpless. A thousand and a thousand agonizing thoughts have seized your oppressed heart. You have sunk into the very depths of despondency and all but absolute despair. You looked on the right hand and on the left for help, but "refuge failed you, no man cared for your soul." For a moment you said, "I will look again unto the hills, whence cometh my help: my help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Then again you have said, desparingly, "I cry and shout, but He shutteth out my prayer." Again, with Job, you have said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him;" and again with Jonah, "I said, I am cast out of Thy sight, yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple." But, in the midst of all these conflicting exercises, and in a way of which you had not the veriest conception previously, succour has been afforded—deliverance wrought; and why? Because "God is faithful;" and because *He* took matters manifestively into His own hand. Hence you have richly and blessedly proved,

"'Tis just in the last distressing hour,
Our God displays delivering power;
The mount of danger is the place
Where we shall see surprising grace."

Thus was it with Abraham and Sarah. They were delivered, because "*the Lord* plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues."

Hence we see the Lord's all-sufficiency and divine faithfulness; whilst at the same time there is not the slightest ground for human boasting; but the rescued and delivered one is bound to testify, "It is *the Lord's* doings, and it is marvellous in mine eyes." Little cause indeed had Abraham for pride or vain-glory in regard to his trial and deliverance; nor has any child of God the least ground whatever for congratulating himself, or even his faith (free and sovereign, heaven-bestowed gift as it is), for any of

the deliverances which he experiences. His language may well be,

“ Oh, to grace how great a debtor,
Daily I'm constrained to be ;
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.”

CHAPTER VIII.

ABRAHAM AND LOT : THE CONTRAST IN CHARACTER—MEMORIALIZING
MERCIES, A PROFITABLE EXERCISE—ABRAHAM'S REVIEW—STRIPE
BETWEEN THE HERDMEN OF ABRAHAM AND LOT—ABRAHAM AND
LOT'S SEPARATION—THE LATTER'S PURE UNSELFISHNESS IN CON-
TRAST TO THE COVETOUSNESS OF LOT—LOT'S CHOOSING FOR
HIMSELF: THE DANGER THEREOF, AND ITS PAINFUL ISSUE—THE
EVIL OF SOWING TO THE FLESH—ABRAHAM'S LIBERALITY ACCEPT-
ABLE TO GOD—CONTACT WITH SIN AND SINNERS: HOW DANGER-
OUS—LOT TAKEN CAPTIVE—ABRAHAM'S BRAVERY—LOT'S RESCUE
—SALVATION ALONE FOR SINNERS—JEHOVAH'S CONDESCENSION
AND BOUNDLESS LOVE—HEART-APPEALS—CRAVINGS AFTER
CHRIST—THE BENEFIT AND THE BLESSEDNESS OF EXPERIENCE.

THE 13th chapter of Genesis is full of interest and instruction. In it the characters of both Abraham and Lot are very strongly delineated. The contrast is most striking. Whilst the one betrays considerable selfishness, the other exhibits the very contrary. The facts of the selfishness of Lot and the surrender of Abraham, may well be endorsed with that most expressive scripture, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (Prov. xi. 24, 25).

We read in the chapter before referred to, that

“Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai; unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord” (Gen. xiii. 1—4).

Beloved, it is well not only to memorialize mercies, and to set up our “heaps,” or our standards and Ebenezers, over against our Bethels, or blessedly-experienced “house of God;” but it is well also to go back in review of old spots and past experiences, in order to call up, instrumentally thereby, the gracious acts, interposing goodness, and boundless benefits of our covenant God in Christ. Such visits and reviewings give a tone and a freshness to present mercies: and, ere we are aware, the light so shining upon the past, prompts us to take down our harp from the willow, under present pressure and anxiety, and to sing—

“He that hath helped us hitherto,
Will help us all our journey through;
And give us daily cause to raise
New Ebenezers to His praise.”

“His love in times past forbids me to think
He’ll leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.”

Abraham, no doubt, reviewed with thankfulness the

Lord's intimations of mercy, as connected with his previous sojourn between Beth-el and Hai ; and acknowledged with gratitude the loving interpositions and gracious deliverances which he had experienced in the interval.

In proof, too, of the kindness which the Lord exercises in regard to His people, and of the unerring wisdom with which He guides and regulates their affairs, see in Abraham the fruit of the lesson which he had been taught, if we mistake not, in reference to *his* choosing to go down into Egypt. We have already intimated our doubts as to his having made his going thither a special subject of inquiry at the throne of grace. We think it is likely that he was more influenced by the force of circumstances than by any direct word from the Lord, such as that which at first prompted him to leave Ur of the Chaldees. But now how different his procedure. "The land," it seems, "was not able to bear" both Abraham and Lot, "that they might dwell together ; for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle, and the herdmen of Lot's cattle : and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen ; for we be brethren." How sweet was the spirit thus manifested by Abraham. What a lover of peace he. How did he drink into the spirit of that scripture, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for

brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments" (Psalm cxxxiii. 1, 2). But not only was Abraham a lover of peace, but he was generous of soul. He had a largeness of heart and a liberality which, being divinely begotten, must of necessity be acceptable to God. "Is not the whole land before thee?" says he, addressing his kinsman: "separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." What thorough unselfishness this, and how satisfied he to be under the guidance of Him who has all hearts in His hands, and who has the control of all circumstances, and the bringing about of all events. How different, though, the spirit of Lot! How striking the contrast between him and Abraham! "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar." Ah, what a snare did that "well watering" subsequently prove to Lot. How important the lesson that his history inculcates. "Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom;" not *in* it, but *toward* Sodom,

as though, if he did not exactly hanker after it, or desire to participate in its doings, its people and its practices were not so offensive to him as they well might have been; seeing it is recorded, that "the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." Lot chose for himself, and how disastrous did that choice prove. He knew not as yet the importance of that scripture, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. x. 23); and again, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. xiv. 12). Lot, as a child of God, for such *he* was, had yet most painfully to be instructed in another scripture, "He that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. vi. 8). Now, whilst Lot sowed to the flesh, Abraham sowed to the Spirit, or, in other words, in this particular case, "committed himself into the hands of Him who judgeth righteously."

As a proof of how acceptable Abraham's conduct was unto God, we read, that "the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." How vast the difference between Lot, at the proposal of Abraham "lifting up his eyes, and beholding all the plains of Jordan," and choosing for himself; and Abraham, at the command of God, "lifting up his

eyes," and surveying, not the plains of Jordan merely, but the land at large, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward, and the Lord pledging Himself that it should be his and his seed's for ever. And, as though this were not enough, Jehovah added, "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered." Then, by way of confirmation, that a promise so large and comprehensive should be ratified and established, and that Abraham might contemplate it deliberately and in all its immensity, the Lord commanded him to "arise, and walk through the land, in the length of it, and in the breadth of it; for," said He, "I will give it unto thee."

The issue of Lot's choice, as a fleshly one, begins to develop itself in the next chapter, where we find that certain kings came against the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah; "and they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way. And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and departed." So that it would seem that, though Lot upon his separation from Abraham, at first merely "pitched his tent *toward* Sodom," he soon found his way into the city, and even "dwelt" there. Thus we see the fruits of evil example, and the truth of that scripture, "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?" (Prov. vi. 27.) "Evil communications," says the Apostle, "corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. xv. 33). Such is the deceitfulness of our

hearts, as poor fallen creatures, and such the treachery of our depraved nature, that contact with sinful precepts and practices, is, in the highest degree, dangerous. There was One, and One only, who could say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John xiv. 30). So far from Satan finding nothing in our poor fallen state that is congenial with his temptations, and agreeable to his suggestions, he finds in our nature, which through the fall has become "earthly, sensual, devilish" (James iii. 15), that which is ever ready to welcome him. It was a knowledge of this most humiliating fact, that prompted the Lord Christ, in the 17th of John, to plead with His Father, "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

In proof that Christian meekness and sobriety do not make men cowards, it is stated, that "when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan. And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which is on the left hand of Damascus. And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people. And the king of Sodom went out to meet him, after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that were with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which

is the king's dale." Then follows that most remarkable account, which is dwelt upon with so much force in the epistle to the Hebrews, as being the first opening out of a divine mystery. "And Melchizedek King of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself." Now observe again at once the steadfastness and sincerity, as well as the large-heartedness of the patriarch. "And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich; save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion."

We have thus far pursued the history of the patriarch, and, under a variety of circumstances, contemplated his character, as preparatory to a consideration of the first gracious "Fear not," which the Lord was pleased to proclaim in His own holy word. Though we have dwelt at some considerable length upon the history of Abraham, and viewed also

in connexion the character of the fall in relation to Adam, we deem that both the one and the other were necessary, in order that, under God, we might the more clearly and forcibly and encouragingly open up the nature of His grace, and the persons whom He is pleased sovereignly to take in hand for the express purpose of exhibiting that grace. It is *sinners*, and *sinners only*, who need *salvation*. Hence to estimate salvation, in all its glorious details, and to obtain in some small degree an insight into the loving, gracious, merciful character of its divine Author and Accomplisher, a covenant God in Christ, we must, as we have attempted to do, examine the persons, and investigate the positions, of those who are made the recipients of love divine.

It was, therefore, in the exercise of His rich and free and sovereign grace, that "the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." The language is as remarkable as it is encouraging, inasmuch as the patriarch had just previously been placed in circumstances in which "a shield" had been needed, whilst he went forth a warrior, to wage war with a victorious foe. God had *proved* Himself to be what He here *promised* to be. The *proof* had preceded the *promise*, though in due time it should still receive confirmation. And, whilst men proffered a reward, the which the patriarch generously declined, the Lord declared that He Himself would be his "exceeding great reward." Jehovah's gifts are boundless and inconceivably

blessed, but Jehovah Himself is infinitely above and beyond all His gifts. His gifts, without Himself, were vain and unsatisfactory. Worlds, without Himself, were valueless. Heaven itself, without Jehovah-Jesus, were a blank. Well, of earth, may the poet sing,—

“ My God, my life, my love,
To Thee, to Thee, I call ;
I cannot live, if Thou remove,
For Thou art all in all.

“ Thy smiling grace can cheer
● This dungeon where I dwell ;
’Tis *paradise* if Thou art here ;
If Thou depart, ’tis *hell*.”

And of heaven equally well may the poet sing,—

“ Were I in heaven without my God,
It were no heaven to me.”

Yes, Himself is above all. Himself alone can satisfy ; Himself only meet the cravings of the immortal soul. Jehovah has created man with a craving which He alone can satisfy ; with a blank which Himself only can fill ; a desire which He alone can meet.

It was in order to instil into the mind of Abraham this momentous lesson, that the Lord led him and trained him as He did. And it is precisely with the same view, dear reader, that the Lord teaches and trains you. You have “ the line upon line, line upon line, precept upon precept, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little,” that you may be most

thoroughly indoctrinated in this most wholesome and indispensable truth. No sophistry of man, no suggestions of Satan, are sufficient to argue you out of verities to the knowledge of which you have attained at so costly a price. Hence the benefit and the blessing of deep, inwrought experience.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE BIBLE—ITS VARIETY AND COMPREHENSIVENESS—GOD HIMSELF THE PORTION OF HIS PEOPLE—A HEART-LACK WHERE GOD IS NOT—GOD'S TIME AND GOD'S WAY THE BEST—RENEWED DEALINGS WITH ABRAHAM—THE END AND OBJECT OF TRIAL—ABRAHAM'S FAITH, AND THE LORD'S RECOGNITION OF IT—FLESH AND FAITH AT VARIANCE—SARAH'S CARNAL COUNSEL—ITS EFFECTS.

THE Bible is full of encouragement, not merely from the absolute nature, and marvellous bestowment of the grace and mercy which it proclaims, but also on account of the immense diversity of character and the many varied circumstances with which it has to do. Well may the word of God be represented as a mirror into which the reader may look for a sight of himself. We see, moreover, the very different course by which the Lord brings out the selfsame truths, in regard to the men whom He sovereignly and savingly instructs. The Lord being our Teacher, we shall see this as we pass onward in these pages. Human frailty and divine forbearance will be seen most strikingly reflected in each history, as it comes under our consideration, though the circumstances under which these are brought out may in themselves widely differ.

Much important matter is introduced in the

chapters which connect the facts just now brought before us, and those which are now to occupy our attention. In those chapters will be seen how forcibly divine judgment and mercy are blended. Let us glance at these facts, and the Lord, in His tenderness, enable us to learn therefrom.

Notwithstanding the definite and the repeated way in which Jehovah had promised to bless Abraham, he, like poor frail man generally, looks at human *appearances* rather than at divine *assurances*. Rich as Abraham was in cattle, in silver, and in gold, there was still *something wanting*—there was a *heart-lack*. This pressed upon him; and from that early day published the great fact, and shall do so down to the latest moment of time, that “vanity of vanities” is written upon everything beneath the sun. All this goes to prove, what we have already sought to show, that *the Lord Himself* is the portion of His people; and, though men in general may say, in the desperate wickedness and carnal enmity of our poor fallen and depraved nature, “No God” (Psalm xiv. 1), they shall find, in spite of themselves, that whatever they may possess or attain to, in regard to the things of this poor sinful world, there still is a lack of that satisfaction and perfect contentment which the heart naturally craves.

“And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus? And Abram said, Behold, to me Thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.”

Thus, in Abraham's view, as is commonly the case with the Lord's people, Jehovah's promises and His providence seem to clash. They lose sight of the fact of God's power as well as His faithfulness; that what He does, He does in His own time and way; and, at the same time, exercises that precious gift of faith which He has been graciously pleased to bestow. He would have His children look to Himself, apart from all external circumstances, and instruct them personally and savingly in a knowledge of the peculiar mercy that

"Precious faith the promise sees,
And trusts to God alone ;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, ' It shall be done.' "

"Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan God's work in vain ;
God is His own Interpreter,
And He will make it plain."

"And, behold, the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir."

Thus did the Lord renew His promise; and we see at once His condescension, and at the same time are furnished with the richest possible encouragement to unbosom our hearts, and to make known our wants unto Him. How was Abraham helped and strengthened in this pursuit. He took advantage of the Lord's words to declare his sorrowful exercises. He no longer kept them to himself; and it was a

matter he well knew in which no human arm could help : hence he went to the Lord.

Oh, reader, be this your mercy ; and, at the same time, be it yours to remember that the very difficulty and apparent discouragement of the case is that which, if rightly viewed, should the more urge you to resort to the throne of grace. This is the true meaning of every trial and temptation wherewith we may be exercised. It is a call from Jesus—an invitation to His footstool. The language, virtually, of every affliction with which a child of God can be visited is, “The Lord hath need of him ;” and this trouble or that temptation is the way in which He tells him so.

Previously, the Lord had said to Abraham, “I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth ; so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.” But, in the present instance, the Lord “brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them ; and He said, So shall thy seed be.” How condescending and how gracious was the Lord thus to make both the earth and the sky to illustrate the fulness and the blessedness of His promise. Does it not, at the same time, reader, prove how deep an interest the Lord Jehovah takes in His creatures ? It is then recorded of Abraham, that “he believed in the Lord ; and He counted it to him for righteousness.” So well pleased was He that this simple assurance was received of Abraham, in spite of all external appearances or present matter of

fact, that this confidence in Himself, and reliance on His word, was accounted as an act of righteousness or obedience upon the part of the patriarch. So much so, that no line of conduct of his, however exemplary or faultless, could have been nearly so acceptable to Jehovah, as, under these trying circumstances, a simple belief in His word was.

The Lord then went on to show Abraham a remarkable sign, in answer to his inquiry as to "how he should *know*" that he should inherit the land. Thus have we a further proof of Divine condescension, and of His readiness to listen to the pleadings of His people.

The history then proves how poor fallen humanity ever has sought to interfere with the Lord's work. Flesh and faith, since the fall, ever have been, and will ever continue to be, at variance. Faith says, "Wait the Lord's time;" Flesh says, "There is nought like the time present." Faith says, "Let it be *the Lord's way*;" Flesh says, "Let it be *my way*."

"And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold, now the Lord hath restrained me from bearing; I pray thee go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai." In this matter he "hearkened to the voice of Sarai," not to the voice of the Lord. True, it may be argued, that, though the Lord had said, *Abraham's child* should be heir, He had said nothing about that child being by Sarah. Sarah might have died, and Abraham might have had another wife, and by her the child of promise. Admitted;

but, to say the least, had Abraham in this matter been under the influence of *faith*, rather than of the *flesh*, he would have said, in reference to Sarah's counsel, "The Lord has indeed made me a promise, but He has by no means shown me the way you suggest as that in which He intends to fulfil it."

We do not now enter upon the question of the Jews in former days having more than one wife or concubine. We merely view the question in the light of a want of faith in Abraham, in that he fell in with the counsel of Sarah, rather than to have waited for the clearer opening and development of the Lord's mind. The more definite the Lord's promise, and the larger the things it embraces, the more severely has that promise to be tested and tried. The greater the gift about to be bestowed, the greater the grace needed to watch and to wait for its bestowment. The more manifestly the matter is to be of God, the more clearly shall it be seen that man has nought to do with it. Hence the child of God may, with propriety, sing—

"Though dark be my way, since He is my guide,
'Tis mine to obey, 'tis His to provide ;
Though cisterns be broken, and creatures all fail,
The word He has spoken shall surely prevail."

Did no other evil arise from Abraham's having followed the counsel of Sarah, certain it is that it laid the foundation of much after-sorrow and dissatisfaction. Distinctly does the word of God declare, that "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption, whilst he that soweth to the Spirit,

shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Abraham found this to his cost, for no sooner does Hagar (Sarah's maid) find she has conceived by Abraham, than her mistress is "despised in her eyes." How far Abraham sanctioned this conduct on the part of Hagar, we know not. Possibly the fact of her being with child, led him to the conclusion that she (and not Sarah) was to be the mother of the child of promise; and this may have led him to regard her with undue interest and attention. Be this as it may, certain it is that jealousy, which is "cruel as the grave," was stirred up in the mind of Sarah; insomuch that she retorts upon Abraham, and in such language as would seem to imply that she was now regarded with (to say the least) comparative indifference and neglect. "My wrong be upon thee," said she to Abraham; "I have given my maid into thy bosom; and, when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes; the Lord judge between me and thee. But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thine hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee." Hence it is evident that Abraham was soon weary of his own way. He smarted severely for having "hearkened to the voice of Sarai;" and so does every child of God who is influenced by mere carnal wisdom, or who seeks in any wise to gratify the flesh. If left to himself, he will discover, to his cost, that "he that trusteth his own heart is a fool," that though "there is a way that *seemeth* right unto a man, yet the end thereof is death." This to the ungodly is death in its fullest sense—death eternal;

but to the redeemed sinner who has been permitted to walk perversely, and merely in accordance with his own fleshly will and way, it is, so to speak, a temporary death—death to his peace, death to his enlargement, death to his enjoyment, death to all his precious privileges, as a child having present access to his father : and all this is distressing to him to the last degree.

Next we find, that Sarah deals so hardly with her maid that she flees from her face ; and the angel of the Lord, finding her in the wilderness, bids her return to her mistress, and submit herself into her hands. She gives heed to this advice, returns to Abraham's house, and in due time brings forth Ishmael, when Abraham was fourscore and six years old.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRIAL OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH: THE OBJECT THEREOF—JUSTIFICATION OPENED UP IN THE DIVINE NATURE AND IMPORTANCE—DELAYS IN DIVINE PERFORMANCE: THE WHY AND THE WHEREFORE—THE ALL-IMPORTANT DISTINCTION BETWEEN FAITH AND WORKS—THE APOSTLE'S DEDUCTIONS—FAITH IN ITS NATURE AND BLESSEDNESS—ITS PEACE-INFUSING PROPERTIES—ITS REPOSE UPON THE FINISHED WORK OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

IN order that Abraham's faith might be tried, and that the very nature and operation of faith might be handed down to every successive generation, the patriarch has to wait for thirteen years before the Lord even renews His promise concerning his seed. And we can well conceive the perplexity in which Abraham's mind was involved during that period, knowing, as without doubt he did, what the angel of the Lord had said to Hagar with respect to her posterity. But our God does not reckon time as we reckon it; neither are His thoughts as our thoughts. A great and important lesson was to be taught Abraham as to *bondage* and *liberty*, *faith* and *works*; and that lesson was to be proclaimed in connexion with him down to the remotest period of time.

As matters of the greatest possible moment were

involved in regard to Jehovah's teachings of Abraham, it would seem to us, at least, that the Lord would (so to speak) take time in His movements in order that there should be no confusion or misapprehension as to the character of the lesson in which, through His dealings with Abraham, He would instruct His Church and people. The nature of justification was to be illustrated and opened up in connexion with the patriarch. God had sovereignly and condescendingly pledged Himself to Abraham; at the same time He infused a believing confidence into the mind of the patriarch, that he should at once accept and depend upon Jehovah's word. This, as we have already said, was so well pleasing to the Lord, that "He counted it to him for righteousness." He accepted it and approved of it, as though it were actual obedience—practical homage—the most rigid personal adoption and working out of Jehovah's holy mind and will. This was Abraham's faith, and faith only, as wrought in Him by the mighty arm of the Omnipotent.

Then, in order that there should be an opportunity afforded for the more clearly discriminating between God's work and man's work, Jehovah tarries ere He performs His promise; and, in the interval, Abraham falls into that carnal course of things which we have just been considering. After thirteen years had elapsed, and not until then, the Lord renews His assurance, coupled with the declaration that it was of Sarah (Abraham's wife), and not of Hagar (the bond-woman), the child of promise was to be born. Then,

and not until then, the patriarch received "the sign of circumcision, (as) a seal of the faith which he had, yet being uncircumcised."

Mark this, reader, for it is very important. Abraham was justified, or "accounted righteous," thirteen years before he was circumcised. The Apostle, in the 4th chapter of his epistle to the Romans, lays a great stress upon this. Hence he says, "Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision."

Circumcision was an act of the creature, performed, it is true, by the direction of God. Nevertheless, had not Abraham been justified until he was circumcised, he must, to all intents and purposes, have been justified by *works*; and this would be to upset the whole Gospel plan of salvation, which is grounded upon the incontrovertible fact, that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight;" "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "Being justified freely," says the Apostle, "by His GRACE, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be the propitiation through *faith* in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time, His righteousness; that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in

Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of *faith*. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law."

Thus writes the Apostle Paul, in the 3rd chapter of his epistle to the Romans: then, that he may enforce the matter still more emphatically and clearly, he opens the next chapter with the inquiry, "What shall we then say, that Abraham, our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Then the Apostle adds, "Now to him that *worketh* is the reward not reckoned of *grace*, but of *debt*; but to him that *worketh not*, but BELIEVETH ON HIM that justifieth the ungodly, his FAITH is counted for righteousness, even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God *imputeth righteousness without works*, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are *forgiven*, and whose sins are *covered*. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not *impute sin*." The Psalmist did not say that there was not any sin or iniquity; but he pronounced that man and his condition as blessed whose iniquities were *forgiven*, and whose sins were *covered*; and how was this to be done? By the Lord's imputing to him, or reckoning as his, the righteousness of *Another*. That *Other* was the Lord Jesus Christ, whose death atoned for the sins of His people, and whose obedience to all the holy will of

His Father is set down to the account of all who by simple faith look to and lay hold upon Him, as though *His* act was *their* act, *His* works *their* works, *His* righteousness *their* righteousness. It is theirs by imputation, theirs by transfer. Hence, says the Apostle, "Now the righteousness of God without the law [that is, without the positive obedience to the law in the sinner's own personal act and deed] is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God [*i. e.*, the righteousness which God demands, and with nothing short of which can He be satisfied]; which is, by faith of Jesus Christ [the faith of His own begetting and bestowing, and which apprehends Him, and that righteousness or holiness or perfect purity, is] unto all and upon all them that believe." Thus it is that faith, as wrought in the heart of the redeemed sinner by God the Holy Ghost, beholds in the person and work of Jehovah Jesus that full and free salvation which he, as a sinner, needs; and by virtue of this precious faith, he is brought personally to understand and enjoy the satisfaction and the blessedness of the Apostle's declaration, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh [that is, the creature, through sin and infirmity, was not a match for the law], God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin [or, by a

sacrifice for sin, *margin*], condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 1—4.)

Reader, we have dwelt at some length upon this subject, because of its vast importance. Justification, or how a sinner is to be acquitted and accepted of God, is of higher moment than any other theme. Nothing can vie with it. And to a want of a clear and scriptural perception of this doctrine is to be ascribed, instrumentally, the want of solid peace, and the very great amount of uneasiness, suspense, and discomfort to which many of the people of God are subject. They look into themselves and at their doings; feeling deeply their own sinfulness, and conscious of the absolute worthlessness of all their works, they regard both the one and the other as a mark of ruin, and of God's utter disregard. Whereas the fact is precisely the contrary. Their felt depravity and conscious destitution is a glorious proof and evidence of Divine teaching, and is only the prelude to a soul-satisfying, heart-cheering discovery, that Christ is "made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. i. 30, 31). "For we ourselves (says the same Apostle, in his epistle to Titus) also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the

kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost ; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour ; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

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" Weary, working, plodding one,
Wherefore toil you so ?
Cease your doing, all was done
Long, long ago.

" Till to Jesu's work you cling,
By a simple faith ;
Doing is a deadly thing—
Doing ends in death.

" Cast your deadly doing down—
Down at Jesu's feet :
Stand in Him, in Him alone,
Gloriously complete."

CHAPTER XI.

THE TWO DISTINCT NATURES IN ABRAHAM—RENEWED COMMUNINGS—
ABRAHAM LAUGHED: WHY?—ABRAHAM'S PLEA FOR ISHMAEL
—PARENT'S PRAYERS—THE APOSTLE PAUL'S SOUL-TRAVAIL FOR
HIS BRETHREN — APPEAL TO THE CHRISTIAN PARENT — EN-
COURAGEMENT—"IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?"—
DANGER OF INCITING CHILDREN TO EXPRESS MORE THAN THEY
FEEL—SOWING IN TEARS, BUT REAPING IN JOY—JEHOVAH'S
TENDERNESS SO RICHLY MANIFESTED IN HIS DEALINGS WITH
ABRAHAM — CONTENTION BETWEEN FLESH AND SPIRIT — THE
TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF HUMAN NATURE—GRACE NO LICENCE FOR
SIN—FAITH A LIVING FRUIT-BEARING PRINCIPLE—APPEAL TO
THE READER.

WE return to the history of Abraham, and we wish the reader most carefully and scrupulously to mark the operation of two distinct principles in Abraham, those distinct principles appertaining to two equally distinct natures. It is necessary to do this in order to see what was of the *flesh* in Abraham, and what was of *faith*, what was of *God*, and what of *man*. Abraham was not, any more than his seed, perpetually and continuously under the sweet influence and operation of *faith*. We have seen already how *flesh* at times gained the ascendancy: and a mercy it is that God has caused this to be left upon record, not only that we may thus have an oppor-

tunity of distinguishing between things that differ, but that we may likewise see that it was with one of our own poor fallen race Jehovah had of old to do, even as now.

“And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her : yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations ; kings of people shall be of her. Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old ? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear ?”

Now, a difficulty presents itself here. Did Abraham “laugh” in token of gladness and rejoicing at what the Lord had promised ? or did he “laugh” in plain language at the absurdity and unlikelihood of such a thing, as he said in his heart, “Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old ? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear ?” It must be borne in mind, that, though God had graciously promised a vast seed to Abraham, this was the first mention of Sarah being the mother thereof.

Again, another difficulty presents itself as to the spirit in which “Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before Thee !” Did Abraham, when he laughed, doubt the Lord’s promise in regard to Sarah, and say, “O that Ishmael might live before Thee !” “O that he who is verily alive, and about whose existence there can be no doubt—O that he may be the earnest and forerunner of this

numerous progeny?" And did the Lord, in His pitifulness and forbearance, reassure Abraham of the fact in reference to Sarah, so as to disperse his doubts about the matter, as we read, "And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac, and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him?"

Was this, we ask, the position of matters, or did Abraham take advantage of the privileged season with which he was indulged, when thus the Lord reassured him of His gracious goodwill towards and loving interest in him, to ask for covenant favours and distinguishing love and mercy on behalf of Ishmael? He loved Ishmael. He was his child. Through his instrumentality an immortal soul had been ushered into being; and now, from the depths of a heart becomingly affected with the solemn responsibility which, as a parent, was entailed upon him, he ardently craves spiritual and eternal blessings on behalf of his offspring. "O that Ishmael may (eternally) live before Thee!"

The like prayer has burst from the burdened heart of myriads of anxious parents. Of necessity, such must be the case where the heart is rightly affected. We can have no sympathy with those who know nothing of heart-wrestlings and holy importunities at the throne of grace on account of their children. Shall the Apostle go so far as to say, "That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart: for I could wish that myself were

accursed [separated] from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh ;” and shall godly parents have no deep heart-concern about their children? What! leave matters to take their own course? No weight, no anxiety, no concern? No pleading at the throne, “O that Ishmael might live before Thee?”

We must confess, that, if such be the case, we cannot understand it, neither have we any sympathy whatever with such a spirit. Personally we trust we rejoice as much as any in the covenant verities of a gracious covenant God. We know that He is of one mind, and none can turn Him; and what He purposeth that He doth. We know, and rejoice in the fact, that “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who showeth mercy;” that His people are “born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” At the same time that we believe these immutable verities in all their length and breadth, we do also fully believe that Jehovah has so coupled the end with the means, and so connected the spirit of prayer, as infused into His people, with the promise that He purposes to fulfil on their behalf, that every godly parent must, almost as a matter of absolute necessity, cry, “O that (my) Ishmael might live before Thee!”

The ever-constant petition of a long-sainted mother is too dear to the writer’s memory, ever to be indifferent to so momentous a matter. Uniform was her exclamation on behalf of her children, “O

that not one may be found wanting in the day when Thou comest to make up Thy jewels!"

Dear reader, if a parent, will you not unite with us in the self-same ardent cry? Who can effect the work but God Himself? It is *His* power, and *His* alone, can accomplish it. But then how great the mercy, in reference to all our difficulties and discouragements, that "All things are possible with God." For many years, in numberless straits and difficulties as to human accomplishments, our favourite watchword has been, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

Fully can we sympathize with you in, it may be, your want of power to address your children, personally and individually, as you would. You may find—at least some others have done—that it is easier to talk to the Lord about your children, than with your children about the Lord, as to His own personal and individual acting with their hearts and consciences. But this (trial as it may be to you) will prove to be of the Lord, if so be this very difficulty only causes you to go the oftener, and with the more importunity, to the throne of grace.

Of nothing, perhaps, should we the more beware, than of making our children *express* more than they *feel*. Incalculable injury has arisen from this. Let simple truth be put before the children. The fact of the fall in Adam, and the universal corruption that has arisen therefrom; the absolute and indispensable necessity for the new birth; the subtilty of Satan; the ensnarements of the world; the corruptions of the

flesh, and deceitfulness of the human heart; the uncertainty as well as the brevity of life; the certainty of death, and the fact of a never-ending eternity in unutterable blessedness, or in inconceivable woe: let these verities be put perpetually and affectionately before our children, and let exhortation be watered with prayer. Be assured it cannot be lost. Long may the seed thus sown be buried, and seemingly to no purpose: but it may be said of parents, as well as of teachers and ministers—

“Let those who sow in sadness wait
Till the bright harvest come;
They shall confess their sheaves are great,
And shout the blessings home.”

“They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth, and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm cxxvi. 5, 6.)

There is an express and most encouraging word for parents, in reference to the bringing up of their children, in Prov. xxii. 6: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and, when he is old, he will not depart from it.” The language clearly implies, that there may be an interval between the seed-sowing and the springing up: but a promise, nevertheless, is attached; and our God never forgets or forfeits His word. Hence parents and teachers may go forward, sowing the good seed of the word in prayer, and hope, and expectancy, rejoicing in the mercy that the Lord hath said, “As the rain cometh down, and the snow

from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isaiah lv. 10, 11).

How well, dear reader, may these gracious promises cheer and encourage, leading us to look off from mere appearances; to dispense with all fleshly reasonings; to fall back upon the oath and promise of the Lord; and thus, as Abraham did, "against hope to believe in hope."

The extreme condescension and boundless mercy of our God will be the more obvious when it is considered how repeatedly He appeared to Abraham, in order to reassure him of the fulfilment of His promise; and to us it appears as though the very manner in which the Lord thus reassures the patriarch, proved the divine recognition of the weakness and frailty of poor fallen nature. He well knew that the promise which He was making to His servant ran directly counter to nature, and that any reception of or belief in that promise must be by a power apart from that nature. Abraham, in the frailty of his humanity, did not receive nor rejoice in the promise of Jehovah, but it was only in and by the power of the faith which Jehovah Himself bestowed, that the patriarch received and believed the promise. The Lord well knew this—He was fully aware of what the flesh of Abraham was, as well as that of other men. He

did not then, nor does He now, seek "to gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles." As David said, in after day, with respect to the gifts of Jehovah, so might Abraham say in regard to the faith the Lord had implanted, "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee" (1 Chron. xxix. 14). Thus must every temporal as well as spiritual gift be traced up to Jehovah Himself. No spiritual seed ever grew in the soil of poor fallen nature. There is no moisture, nor consequently any growth, in the rocky heart of man. Hence, when Jehovah addressed Himself to Abraham, He had to meet the natural scepticism and unbelief of human nature, and to infuse a power into Abraham that should contend with himself as a fallen creature. "I will certainly return unto thee," said the Lord, addressing Himself to Abraham, "according to the time of life, and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son." The very word "certainly" implies the existence of a doubt and a hesitancy upon the part of Abraham; and we contend that there was nothing in him, *as a man naturally*, but did hesitate and doubt. It was in his new nature he believed, not in his *old* and *fallen* nature. This neither could nor can believe. Everything truly saving or spiritual is connected with another life, or nature—that life or nature as distinct from the natural life, or fallen nature, as light is distinct from darkness, or heaven from hell. Matters were precisely the same in this respect in Abraham's day

as in the day when our Lord said to Nicodemus, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John iii. 1); or, when Paul said unto the Galatians, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would" (Gal. v. 17). "*It is the Spirit quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing*" (John vi. 63).

It will be plain to the reader, that we have no very exalted view of human nature, and that we regard that nature, whether it be in believers or unbelievers, as altogether *incapable of any real spiritual good*. Certain it is, that the Apostle Paul was precisely of this opinion; for, many years after he had been called by divine grace, and was manifestly "in Christ Jesus," he said, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) there dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. vii. 18). Nor do we make these declarations for the purpose of extenuating sin, or making excuses for iniquity, in the people of God: in this matter we most emphatically say, God forbid! Our object is to call things by their right names, and to trace all good up to its only and its legitimate source—God Himself! We desire, at the same time, to bear our humble testimony to the fact, as well as to the nature of salvation. We rejoice to echo and re-echo to the testimony of the Apostle, who, in writing to the Church at Ephesus, says, "By grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. ii. 8, 9).

Whilst, however, we cannot admit of any progress or improvement in the fleshly nature of the child of God, we rejoice in His gracious declarations by the Apostle, as expressed in Romans vi.:—"Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace." The line is very narrow, and oftentimes scarcely perceptible, between Antinomian presumption; a Pharisaic formality, or dependence upon creature-doings; or what is termed faith, which consists in a simply taking for granted what God has said. We know this is very blessed, and contains in it the very germ of faith. But true saving faith is not the mere cold assent or consent to what Christ has done, or Jehovah has said. This letter-faith multitudes may have, but, at the same time, be entirely destitute of that living sacred principle which the Holy Ghost implants in the heart, and which He calls forth into active exercise. Saving faith is a fruit-bearing power. It "works by love" (Gal. v, 6). Hence, we not only read "the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God," but we have abundant examples of the same throughout the sacred Scriptures. These will, as the Lord the Spirit may enable us, come under our consideration in these pages, by which we hope clearly to show, that though the redeemed are not justified by works, that yet "faith without works is dead" (James ii. 26).

We cannot pass over unnoticed one or two of the remarkable facts before us in the 18th to the 20th chapters of the book of Genesis, inasmuch as they

contain what is eminently calculated both to caution and comfort the heart of every seeker after truth.

After the Lord had renewed His promise, that Sarah should have a son, she "laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also? And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I, of a surety, bear a child, which am old? Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."

Oh, beloved, see the goodness of our God. He takes advantage, so to speak, of the very incredulity of Sarah, to magnify His own grace and mercy. The very unlikelihood of the thing of which He spoke coming to pass, only made way for the clearer exhibition of both His pity and His power. Nor was He to be turned from His purpose, though with the facts above stated stands recorded another of a most humbling character. "Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for *she was afraid*. And He said, Nay, but thou didst laugh."

Now, here are a variety of circumstances which express, most graciously and gloriously, the boundless love, and tenderness, and compassion of our God. For far less than that of which Sarah was guilty, the Lord, in the exercise of His rightful indignation, has cut off, even to destruction, many of His creatures. But *she* was spared; and, in connexion with the forbearance and long-suffering that the Lord was pleased then sovereignly to exercise, He has handed

down to every succeeding generation an argument and a plea with which He hath been plied at a throne of grace times without number, and which, but for the facts mentioned, might never have been left on record. Thus the Lord brings good out of evil.

In the midst of the countless difficulties and dangers to which the Lord's people have been, and are exposed, in their journey through the present world, how often has the cry burst from their burdened and almost broken hearts, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Vain has it been for them to judge from appearances; powerless has been an arm of flesh; utterly to no purpose has been every appeal to the creature. By an invisible, but almighty hand, has the Lord's child been led into a position, and been called to grapple with circumstances, in which the Lord alone could sustain, and from which the Lord alone could deliver. Nor could such child in any other way have been brought "to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils," or, in the exercise of a simple, childlike faith, "stand still," with Israel of old, to "see the salvation of the Lord" (Ex. xiv. 13). How many, moreover, have then and there found that what appeared to render their defeat, yea, their utter destruction, inevitable, has been the very means which the Lord has eternally designed for bringing about His own purposes, and far more than fulfilling the utmost wishes and boundless desires of His own dear people; as it is written (Judges xiv. 14), "Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness."

Reader, do you know anything of these experiences in a personal and heartfelt way? Can you look back to certain times and certain circumstances, and adopt the 124th Psalm as your own? "If it had not been **THE LORD** who was on our side, now may Israel say; if it had not been **THE LORD** who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: then the proud waters had gone over our soul. Blessed be the Lord, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

Moreover, if in very deed this has been your experience of Jehovah's tenderness and compassion, has not the Lord connected with it another mercy? With regard to those who have conspired against you—who have laid snares for your feet—who, as in your Lord and Master's case, "have laid to your charge things that you knew not," has not the Lord, in regard to them, ratified and confirmed His own word? "Fret not thyself because of evil doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity; for they shall be cut down as the grass, and wither as the green herb. Commit thy way unto the Lord: trust also in Him, and He [not thou] shall bring it to pass; and He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday" (Psalm xxxvii).

He shall make thy integrity and the justness of thy dealings clear as the light, scattering to the four winds everything that would seem, in the estimation of thy fellow-man, to invest thy course or conduct with the veriest cause for suspicion or doubt. Oh, how inconceivably blessed is it when the Lord executes His own word: "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him" (Ps. xii. 5).

CHAPTER XII.

DIVINE CONDESCENSION—THE POWER OF PRAYER—ABRAHAM PLEADING ON BEHALF OF THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN—THE PEOPLE OF GOD IN ENGLAND HER SECURITY—LOT AND HIS CHOICE—LESSONS.

PERHAPS no clearer proof of the Lord's boundless mercy and condescending compassion towards His people can be given than in relation to what immediately followed the facts with regard to Sarah, mentioned in our last chapter. "Shall I hide from Abraham," said the Lord, "that thing which I do? seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him."

Thus we see the Lord's condescension in revealing to Abraham His own great and divine purposes. He made known to him, poor, frail creature as he was, what in all probability was hidden from angels; and thus we see how great the interest Jehovah taketh in His people.

Again, there was the recognition, upon the part of

the Lord, of that holy fear and godly jealousy which He Himself had implanted in the heart of His servant. He foresaw and lovingly recognized the fruit of His own work in Abraham; and by it we may scripturally infer how acceptable to God is that holy concern and Christian example which every true partaker of faith, in common with the father of the faithful—which every godly parent, teacher, or guardian—seeks to set before and to inculcate in the hearts and minds of those committed to his care.

Furthermore, we have evidence and proof in the 18th chapter of how the Lord places Himself in a position to be (shall we say) remonstrated with, by those in whose hearts He instils a power of argument. By the prophet, in a later day, the Lord said, "Bring forth your strong arguments; plead with me." And again: "Come, and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Again, we read: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Now, from all this we learn how the Lord Jehovah "delighteth in mercy." It is but the carrying into operation that very pitifulness and compassion which He so richly manifested in the repeated pleas and arguments which He put into Abraham's mouth. "And Abraham drew near and said, Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city, wilt Thou also destroy, and not spare the place for the

fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked; and that the righteous shall be as the wicked, that be far from Thee. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" What language can be more that of fervent plea? What strength of reasoning! how ardent the importunity! followed, too, by so earnest an appeal to the character of Jehovah, who is so jealous of His great name. "And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then will I spare all the place for their sakes."

What unmistakable proof is this of the blessing and the security ensured to a place by the presence of the Lord's people. They are the salt of the earth; and on their account is the world kept in existence. Let the last vessel of mercy be removed, let the number of God's elect be "accomplished," and then immediately follows the destruction of the world.

"And Abraham answered and said, Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes; peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous; wilt Thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And He said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it."

Now, had not Abraham a becoming sense of his condition as a sinner, and had he not possessed a correspondingly becoming sense of the holy freedom he was exercising, he would not have expressed himself as he did in declaring himself to be "but dust and ashes." It was a most apt and proper way of

setting forth his sense of sin, and an acknowledgment of the solemn part he was prompted, in spite of himself, to perform; and may well prove a ground of encouragement to plead with the Lord, in every time of necessity, and under every renewed discovery of difficulty or distress.

“And he spake unto Him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And He said, I will not do it for forty’s sake. And he said unto Him, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak, Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And He said, I will not do it if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And He said, I will not do it for twenty’s sake. And he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once, Peradventure ten shall be found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for ten’s sake.”

Not only may the arguments thus advanced by Abraham afford the greatest possible encouragement to every sin-burdened or sorrowful soul to spread his case before the Lord, and to wrestle ardently and anxiously with Him, resolved (Jacob-like) “not to let Him go except He bless him;” but Abraham’s example furnishes us also with material for pleading with the Lord, at the present time, on behalf of our long-and-highly-favoured land. Indifferent as England is to her mercies—undervalue as she does her dearly-bought privileges—fritter away as she may her freedom and her liberty—sympathize as she

does with the deadly enemies of our common faith—Romanism and Rationalism—she, nevertheless, has within her dominions not tens, nor twenties, nor thirties merely, but thousands upon thousands of God's own redeemed people, concerning whom it may be said, "Whoso toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye." Whatever may be the mere outward aspect of the times in which we live, and however "truth may have fallen in our streets," still the same may be said in our day, as in that of the prophet, "Yet have I left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not blessed him."

This fact—and an undeniable fact it is—suggests to every true spiritual lover of his country matter for ardent importunity, at the throne of grace, that the Lord would, in mercy, remember His people, and deal tenderly and forbearingly with the land on their behalf. It is at once their privilege and their province to intercede with Jehovah, that He would, on these accounts, as well as because He is what He is—so merciful and so gracious—"in the midst of deserved judgment remember mercy."

The circumstances connected with the destruction of the cities of the plain, are such as to show how marvellous the condescension, and how boundless and infinite the love of God to His people. It would seem that there was only one who really knew and loved the Lord in Sodom, at the time of its destruction, and even his love and reverential fear was so obscured by selfishness, and worldliness, and sin, that but for

the Holy Ghost's own comment upon Lot's character, we might have justly stood in doubt of him. In speaking of him, the Holy Ghost, by the Apostle Peter, testifies of Jehovah as having "delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; for (he continues) that righteous man, dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds."

It would seem that but for their own base wickedness and unbelief, the sons-in-law of Lot would have been saved from destruction—not certainly on their own account, but because of their connexion with Lot: but, when he urged them to make their escape from the doomed city, we read, that "he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law." Then we read, that "while Lot lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto them; and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass when they brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed." Again, after the remonstrance of Lot, we read with regard to his flight unto Zoar, the angel said, "Haste thee, escape thither; for *I cannot do anything till thou be come hither.*"

What greater proof of divine condescension and goodness and mercy could possibly have been given than in the circumstances just mentioned; and how

fraught are these facts—solemn, yea, awful, as they are—with the richest encouragement to every anxious and truly spiritually-enlightened soul. What a key these facts furnish to the very heart of our God. How rich His mercy! how boundless His compassion! how condescending His love! how astounding His interest in such poor, sinful, polluted worms of the earth as we are! Who need despair of mercy after such a man as Lot found mercy? Who fear to be heard at the throne of grace when Abraham first, and Lot afterwards, were heard there? There is no ground for discouragement, much less despair, for any poor sinner, who, conscious of his need, flees unto Him for grace and mercy, who declared, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick; . . . I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

CHAPTER XIII.

HUMAN NATURE—CONTINUOUS TEACHING INDISPENSABLE—ABRAHAM'S
VAIN POLICY AGAIN—TROUBLES, FOR MOST PART, THE FRUITS
OF FOLLY—GOD HIMSELF THE DELIVERER OF HIS PEOPLE—
PRAYER TO BE PRESENTED IN SPITE OF APPEARANCES—APPEAL
TO THE READER—THE RESTRAINING POWER OF JEHOVAH—RASH
CONCLUSIONS TO BE AVOIDED IN REGARD TO THE AFFLICTIONS
OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE—GOD THE DEFENDER OF HIS PEOPLE.

IF one had not some little knowledge of the human heart in its forgetfulness and unbelief, one would have supposed that Abraham would have so far profited by a former lesson as most carefully to have avoided the veriest approach to what might have involved him in similar trouble. But such is poor fallen nature, that it requires continuous discipline, and the self-same lessons to be put before it in endless method and variety. Our first Adam-nature is never to be trusted. If it be trusted, it is sure to betray us into evil of some kind or other.

With change of place, the fears which possessed Abraham, some twenty years before, again seize upon him; and, in order that he may retain Sarah as his wife, he declares her to be his sister. Abraham's policy once more proves a failure, and, but for divine interposition, would only bring about that of all

things which Abraham was anxious to avoid. Here, as before, under very similar circumstances, the Lord took matters manifestly into His own hands. Abraham was powerless. If he saw not his error, doubtless he was at a perfect loss what further step to take. It is not so certain that at first he called upon God to *direct*, as that he now calls upon Him to *deliver*. *Haste* upon the part of the people of God often leads to *hazard*; *fleshly presumption* is intimately connected with *fleshly perils*. For most part the people of God have themselves to thank for their troubles; they are sent mostly in a way of fatherly correction. We believe that comparatively few are the trials and afflictions of the children of God respecting which they may not appeal to their own hearts and consciences, and say, "Hast thou not procured these things unto thyself?" The consciousness of this tends to keep them in measure quiet and passive, under the chastening hand of Him who will not connive at the sin or the self-will of His people. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth," said the Psalmist, "because Thou didst it."

God, as it has already been intimated, took again the matter of Abraham and Sarah very obviously into His own hands. Much as Abraham might be at a loss to know what to do, the Lord was in no such difficulty. Herein were His wisdom, love, and power the more marked. In a totally different, but not less effectual way to that in which, on a former occasion, he afflicted Pharaoh and his people, and brought them to a knowledge of the relationship

subsisting between Abraham and Sarah, He now communes with Abimelech, king of Gerar. The Lord came to him in a dream by night, and filled him with a holy awe of His divine Majesty, and at the same time accepted his fervent appeal with regard to the integrity of heart and innocency of hands by which he had been led into the course he had adopted. And how condescending and how gracious was it of the Lord to answer, "Yea, I know that thou didst it in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me; therefore suffered I thee not to touch her."

What a field of thought does this subject open. How clearly does it show, that an appeal to God, in times of distress and perplexity, is amply sufficient, without venturing to dictate to Him as to the method or means to be adopted for deliverance. The peculiar mode of succour it is His prerogative—and His alone—to discover. Nor is it necessary that the afflicted or oppressed one should wait until he see some sign or indication of succour before he appeals to the mercy-seat. In this respect the greater the blank the better—the less appearance of help, the more marked of God the deliverance when vouchsafed. The prophet had declared to Ahab that there was "a sound of abundance of rain," but yet his servant had subsequently to go again and again, even up to seven times, and look toward the sea, ere he could say, "Behold, there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand." This was the first visible sign and token that Elijah had not in vain gone up

“to the top of Carmel, and cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees.” Here was the prophet in the attitude of prayer; here in holy wrestling; here in ardent importunity; and that, too, whilst as yet there was lacking the veriest human appearance of being heard.

Reader, this is prayer, and prayer, too, prompted by faith; and that faith a God-wrought principle that holds its divine Author to His word. Alas! alas! how little is the nature and actings of this faith known. Faith is that special and peculiar power which, regardless of the most unpromising appearances, and under consciousness of the deepest demerit of the applicant, pleads with God upon the ground of who He is, and what He has promised.

Reader, do you know anything of this faith, feelingly and experimentally? Have you been familiar, more or less, with such positions and such circumstances, as to be compelled to “cease from man;” to “lean not upon an arm of flesh,” but to look to and lean upon simply and entirely, *Jesus only*? Have you been compelled, from dire necessity, to exclaim, “I will go in before the king, which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish?” At the same time, have you known what it was to experience that marvellous power, and that wondrous pleading, that, though nought but a poor sinful worm of earth, you have been emboldened to address the Majesty of heaven with a “What wilt Thou do unto Thy great name?” Jacob-like, you have felt that astounding influence so to take possession of you, that you have

with intensity of emotion cried, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

"You could no denial take,
For you asked for Jesu's sake "

Oh, what glorious secrets are these—secrets made known only to those of whom it is written, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show unto them His covenant."

Again, how often is it seen now—but how much more fully shall it be discovered hereafter—that it was the Lord—and the Lord alone—that "withheld (His people) from sinning against Him." Oh, how often has He, so to speak, thrust his hand, imperceptibly but effectually, between the tempter and the tempted; the one has been defeated, the other defended; and but for that defence, assuredly absolute destruction must, in numberless instances, have ensued. Nor has the delivered one the least ground whatever for congratulating *himself* in the abstract for that deliverance. He sees—He feels—that deliverance to be of God, and not of himself; but, sooner or later, he detects in himself an outgoing of heart with the tempter in regard to the temptation. He feels that the temptation (whatever it may have been) was congenial to his poor fallen nature; it was agreeable to his flesh, or in keeping with the circumstances by which he was surrounded; hence the rescue was the more manifestively of God.

There is another proof of divine condescension with respect to the position of Abraham at this time.

"Now, therefore," said the Lord, "restore the man his wife; for he is a prophet, and *he shall pray for thee*, and thou shalt live." Thus, in order to subdue any anger that might arise in the mind of Abimelech against Abraham, for the part he had acted in the matter, the Lord, as it were, lays him under an obligation to the latter to pray for him, for, upon condition of Abraham's prayer, Abimelech was to be spared. Very similar condescension was exercised upon the part of the Lord with respect to Job, who, after he had humbled himself in the sight of the Lord, and declared that he had "uttered that he understood not; things too wonderful for him, which he knew not," directed Eliphaz and his two friends to take "seven bullocks and seven rams, and go to His servant Job, and offer up for themselves a burnt offering; and my servant Job (said God) shall pray for you: for him will I accept."

These facts may well act as a caution to those who may be disposed too hastily to form a judgment as to the Lord's dealings with some of His people, when He sees fit to chasten them severely, or to visit them with some peculiar trial or affliction. Men are not on these accounts to suppose, as Eliphaz did with respect to Job, that there is some "secret thing" with them; or, in other words, that there is some iniquity hidden or connived at. How false were the conclusions to which the people of Melita came with regard to the shipwrecked Paul, who, when he had "gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened

on his hand. And, when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said, among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit, they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly ; but, after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god."

How rash, then, are oftentimes the suppositions of men with respect to some of those special trials and peculiar temptations or troubles with which the Lord sees fit to exercise His people. What men may imagine to be in anger, or just retribution upon the part of Jehovah, is simply the fruit of parental love, and the wisest, tenderest discipline ; the which the Lord, in His own time, and in His own equally special and peculiar way, will open up and explain, to the glory of His own great name, and to the vindication and acquittal of His servants.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOD A FAITHFUL GOD—A SET TIME FOR HIS WORKING—THE TIME AS WELL AS THE MODE OF DELIVERANCE KNOWN ALONE TO HIMSELF—FAITH—PRACTICAL LESSONS FROM BOTH OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT BELIEVERS—SARAH'S RECOGNITION OF THE DIVINE HAND—THE PRIDE OF THE HUMAN HEART—MOSES COMMISSIONED TO CAUTION THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AS TO THE INDULGENCE OF SELF-SATISFACTION—PRIDE AND PHARISAEISM HATEFUL TO GOD—CREATURE-IDOLATRY AND ITS FRUITS—THE WEANING OF ISAAC—ISHMAEL'S PERSECUTION—ST. PAUL'S COMMENTS THEREON—THE VAST DISTINCTION BETWEEN LAW AND GOSPEL: OR, THE WORKS OF THE FLESH AND THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT—THE LAW EXPOUNDED—SALVATION ALONE BY GRACE—FAITH APPREHENDING ETERNAL FREEDOM IN AND BY THE DOING AND DYING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST—GOSPEL LIBERTY.

“AND the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken.” God is a faithful God, nor was He ever known to forego His promise, or forfeit His word. “He is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent.” Having promised, He will most assuredly perform. No obstacles can impede, no difficulties prevent. The greater the perplexity, the more unpromising appearances, the greater the likelihood (in a Gospel sense) of the matter being brought about, and the thing coming to pass.

Some twenty years had rolled away, it is true, since God had promised Abraham a son ; he and Sarah had waxed still greater in age ; fleshly means had been resorted to, in order to bring about what God had promised, or in a carnal way to express a disbelief in its fulfilment. Still, notwithstanding all, in God's time the thing came to pass. " Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, *at the set time of which God had spoken to him.*"

Here was the secret : it was God's set time, and that set time He seldom discloses any more than the precise way or means by which He intends to fulfil His promises. True it is He foreshowed to Abraham how long his seed should dwell in Egypt, and He declared to His prophets how long Israel should tarry in Babylon ; and with scarcely less clearness has the Lord testified how long Antichrist should reign ; but, for the most part, a certain obscurity prevails about the Lord's time and the Lord's way of fulfilling His word and accomplishing His purposes. The reason is, as the Lord declared to His disciples, upon the eve of His ascension to glory, " It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father has put in His own power." The Lord intends that the very uncertainty of both the time and the manner of His working, should lead, on the part of His people, to a more steadfast looking to and patient waiting for Himself. This very want of a clearer and more definite insight into His holy will and purpose, is that in which Faith delights. It is here she revels, here she rejoices. She has the fullest possible con-

fidence in both the promise and the power of her divine Begetter, and reposes on His word in the fullest and most unshaken expectation. Faith "rejoices in hope of the glory of God." Thus Faith and Hope are handmaids.

We have lessons of the most personal and practical character throughout the sacred page. And upon this ground we have so much cause for thankfulness that the Holy Ghost has gone so much into detail in regard to many Old Testament characters, in order not only that we might have the fuller insight into His gracious dealings with the fallen sons and daughters of our race, but that we may see also illustrated and confirmed His own testimony, that "as in water face answereth to face, so doth the heart of man to man."

Now we have put before us with respect to Abraham and Sarah another important lesson, to which we shall do well to take heed.

"And Abraham was an hundred years old when his son Isaac was born unto him. And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me. And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born him a son in his old age."

Here was, on the part of Sarah, a recognition of the divine hand, for she said, *God* hath made me to laugh; but is it unreasonable to suppose that there was, notwithstanding, a certain amount of self-satisfaction? Might there not have been far more of the

creature—more pride than Sarah was aware of—coupled with the saying, “Who would have said unto Abraham that *Sarah* should have given suck? for *I* have born him a son in his old age.”

Certain it is, that Satan and our own proud and treacherous hearts are always on the alert, and ever prone to seek to mar God’s gracious gifts by a species of self-appropriation. There is a vast deal more of the Nebuchadnezzar-greeting about us all than we are disposed to conceive, “Is not this great Babylon that *I* have built?” It was upon this very ground that the Lord, by His servant, so often and emphatically cautioned and admonished Israel. “Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes, which I command thee this day; lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy flocks and thy herds multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied: then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. . . . And thou say in thine heart, *My* power, and the strength of *mine* hand, hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for it is *He* that giveth

thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant, which He swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day. . . . Speak not in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess the land; but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee."

Nothing is more heinous in God's sight—nor will He in the least wise tolerate it in His people—than pride, pharisaism, or self-satisfaction; and equally jealous is He of having any gift, either in providence or grace, being put in the place of Himself. On this account, and seeing how prone His people are to idolatry, many of His gifts are withheld; and, even when bestowed, have to be followed up by another line of teaching and discipline. Not only so, but the very discipline often entails suffering and sorrow upon others, as well as upon those who are more immediately the special objects of this fatherly chastisement and correction.

So was it with both Abraham and Sarah. Isaac was weaned, and, upon the occasion, Abraham gives a special entertainment. A great feast commemorates the day. Sarah, without doubt, was especially congratulated upon such an auspicious occasion; and, it may be, that, to an extent far beyond that of which she was conscious, pride obtains a dominion. The great *I* in Sarah is set up. But, in her case, as well as in every instance in which His children are concerned, the Lord knew how to dethrone the proud

usurper. He will allow of no rivalry. A divided heart will not satisfy Him. He must have a whole heart or none. "Son, daughter, give *me* thine heart," is a charge of most ancient date. "Ye cannot serve Christ and Belial," is of equal antiquity. At the very climax of her joy, a something occurs that changes the whole course of Sarah's feelings. Trifling in itself as the circumstance may have been, it sufficed to mar her happiness, and to cause distress, yea, detestation, to take the place of previous delight and satisfaction. In the very midst of the feast, when, perhaps, the entertainment was at its height, "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, *mocking*." The Apostle, in his epistle to the Galatians, speaks of this act of Ishmael as being one of *persecution*; and various are the conjectures with respect to it. He was now about sixteen years of age, whilst Isaac, at this, the time of his weaning, was three; and as the latter's name signifies laughter, it would seem that, prompted by envy, Ishmael turned Isaac's very name into ridicule. The word *mocking* bears also the signification of *beating*, as elsewhere rendered; and some suppose, that in his jealousy, and from a wish to usurp the birthright, which, under the circumstances did not belong to him, Ishmael sought even the *destruction* of Isaac. Thus the old venom which betrayed itself in Cain with respect to Abel, exhibited itself in Ishmael. Both the one and the other were envious of the spiritual blessing which they perceived to be connected with their brethren in the flesh.

So indignant does Sarah become at what she had witnessed on the part of Ishmael, that she immediately urges upon Abraham the putting him away. "Wherefore," we read, "she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."

There is no doubt but there was a great deal in this conduct of Sarah which was *natural*, and that was prompted by human temperament; it was retaliation for having aforetime been "despised" in the eyes of her maid, and for the son of that maid now seeking to have dominion over—if not indeed to destroy—her son. But, notwithstanding this, the merely natural—and therefore sinful—element, there was much also of the spiritual or divine purpose being wrought out. It was the early development of what was to define between law and gospel—what was of the creature and what was of grace. Hence the Apostle, in after-day, grounded his arguments upon the insufficiency of the works of the law, and the blessedness of the covenant of grace, upon this very circumstance of the casting out of the bondwoman and her son.

The subject matter may be critical—somewhat mysterious—and will run counter to our poor finite conceptions, but in it is embodied, nevertheless, that which faith grasps and revels in, as opening out the grand economy of a salvation which is "without money and without price;" and "not of works, lest any man should boast."

"Tell me," says the Apostle, writing to the Galatians, so recently converts from Judaism, "ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons; the one by a bondwoman (or servant, or slave), the other by a freewoman." And it behoves the reader most carefully to consider, and perpetually to bear in mind, the circumstances under which Abraham did have that son by the bondwoman; that it was altogether of the flesh, according to the dictates and the actings of poor, ignorant, short-sighted, ever-erring humanity, and not in the least wise by the instruction, guidance, and declared approval of God. It was, in a word, of *man*, and not of *God*; and, because it was of man and not of God, was necessarily sinful; hence, as a matter of course, was illustrated and confirmed the declaration, "He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

The Apostle proceeds to say, "But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh"—flesh in its folly, its frailty, its selfishness, in its sinfulness, its hastiness, its disbelief of God's word—"but he of the freewoman was by promise." The promise of a faithful God, in direct opposition to all the merely natural calculations of the flesh; it was to be a birth out of due time, in order that it should be the more clearly manifested that it was of God, exercising, in His own perfect right so to do, His own divine will in His own divine way, for the more vivid bringing about of His own divine purpose.

“Which things,” the Apostle continues, “are an allegory: for these are the two covenants [or testaments]; the one from mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth [or is in the same rank with] to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.”

Now, as already intimated, the Apostle takes up these facts in regard to Agar and Sarah, to open up the momentous distinction between works and grace—law and gospel. We have already seen that Ishmael was born after the flesh; it was a fleshly—and therefore a sinful—matter from first to last; it partook not in the least wise of *faith*, and distinctly are we told that “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.” On the contrary, all and everything in connexion with the birth of Isaac, was of *faith*. In a sense, *flesh* had nothing whatever to do with it. Had things been left to their own natural course—both Abraham and Sarah being past age—Isaac would never have been born; but, because he was the child of promise, because his birth was in the most signal way to be of God, because both in the circumstances in which he was born, and the purpose for which he was born, he was to be an eminent type of the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore was he conceived and brought forth in a way and manner totally separate and distinct from others.

We may run the parallel, or follow out the figure with respect to that which is born of the flesh, and

that which is born of the Spirit—or, in other words, what is of the law, and what is of the gospel—what belongs to Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, and what to Isaac, the child of promise.

Everything of the flesh, or connected with Sinai, or the law, savours of service, drudgery, bondage, dread, dissatisfaction. Fear follows failure. The thunders roar at Sinai; the lightnings flash at Sinai; Sinai burns with fire, and round about it “blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words:” from Sinai echoes and re-echoes, “Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all* things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” “As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse,” and why? Because “the law is holy, and just, and good;” and, being the expression of the mind and character of a holy, just, and righteous God, demands *perfect obedience*. It cannot admit of the veriest flaw or failure. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in *one point*, he is guilty of all. For He (or that law which) said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.” And the Lord Himself, in expounding the law, said, “Ye have heard that it was said by [or to] them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother,

Raca, shall be in danger of the council : but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery : but I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Thus, from this, and the further exposition of the law by Jesus, we discover that "the word of God [or the law of God] is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight : but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do ;" and, so far from their being any compromise or partial fulfilling of the law, the Lord Christ said, when upon earth, "Think not I am come to destroy the law or the prophets ; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil : for verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled."

Hence it is clear, that there is not the least hope whatever of salvation, or escape from the wrath to come, upon the ground of *personal obedience* to the law. The Apostle had discovered this when he testified, "I was alive without the law once : but, when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life,

I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful." The Apostle was in a state of ignorance of what he was, or where he was, until the law was applied to his heart and conscience; then, and not until then, he discovered how fearfully he was involved in sin and condemnation; then all the evil of his fallen and depraved nature rose up in antagonism to that which was in itself pure and honourable.

Now all that the Apostle felt, and all that persons in common with him feel, upon the really spiritual character of the law being opened up to them, causes a deathliness, a dissatisfaction, a despair, in relation to all that is connected with Sinai, and the demands of that covenant which was proclaimed from its frowning heights. All that is dark, gloomy, forbidding, is inseparable therefrom, in and of itself considered.

But, when by grace and power divine, we are led from Sinai to Jerusalem: not the earthly Jerusalem—Jewish or legal Jerusalem (so to speak), "which now is, and is in bondage with her children"—but the Jerusalem which is above, and "which is free, and is the mother of us all," then a very different state of mind possesses us. Light, love, liberty, flow

into the heart; by the Holy Ghost we are quickened to a newness of life in this heavenly city, and "begotten again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Hagar, the bond-woman, is not our mother, but Sarah the free: we are not Hagaranes, Ishmaelites; but Isaacs, the children of the promise, for they, and they only, are "accounted for the seed." We have nought to do with Sinai, or the law, for its penalties were paid, its demands discharged, the fullest homage and obedience rendered by our elder Brother, of whom Isaac was a type.

"The terrors of law and of God,
With me can have nothing to do;
My Saviour's obedience and blood
Hide all my transgressions from view."

Notwithstanding the terms in which we have spoken of the law, it behoves us to inquire in what light the law is held. How far is it respected or otherwise? It is only disregarded or denied as the foundation of hope upon the ground of personal obedience. We have endeavoured to show, from the plain testimony of Scripture, that that personal obedience were a matter of absolute impossibility; every one who knows, even in some small measure, the weakness, and the treachery, and the utter depravity of his own heart, knows that the keeping of the law by him is hopeless. If the keeping of the law of and by himself were the only condition upon which he could be saved, he must be lost to all

intent and purposes. "By the deeds of the law," says the Apostle, "shall no flesh be justified in His sight;" and again, "as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse."

But, because the law is a killing letter; or, in other words, because our sin and weakness, both original and actual, are such, that we are fearfully, and, in and of ourselves, hopelessly and irrecoverably indebted to the law—under its penalty—under its curse; do we therefore hold that law in disrespect or disesteem? As exposed, hopelessly, to its demands, we should; whilst hearing the law say, "Pay me what thou owest," we should. But not, when in and by the exercise of that faith which the Holy Ghost implants and maintains in the heart, we see that that law was obeyed, honoured, magnified to the utmost in, by, and through the person and work of our great and glorious Surety, Substitute, and Sacrifice. Then we can confront Moses, the lawgiver, without shame, confusion, or dismay, because payment has been made; his utmost demands met, the uttermost farthing of his huge debt paid.

"In my Surety I am free."

Hence, says the Apostle, "Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid. Yea, we establish the law." Again, he asks, "Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which would have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the Scripture hath concluded *all* under sin, that the

promise by *faith* of Jesus Christ might be given to them that *believe*. But before *faith* came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the *faith* which should afterwards be revealed." That is, we saw our dilemma; we were brought to a sight and sense of the difficulty and the danger of our position; payment of, as it were, millions sterling was demanded, and we had not a mite wherewith to meet the demand, which our consciences told us was a perfectly just and honourable demand. In this hopeless, helpless condition, we were "shut up," until a certain something was imparted to us; that certain something was *faith*, by which we were enabled joyfully to discover, that, fearfully as we had been involved—hopelessly as we had run in debt—impossible as it was for us to discharge the same, a gracious Advocate—a glorious Surety—a divine Substitute had stepped in, interested Himself in our otherwise hopeless cause, and in His own person, and by His own doing and dying, paid our debt to the very uttermost farthing, and redeemed us from all evil. "Wherefore," says the Apostle, "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by *faith*. But after that *faith* is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by *faith* in Christ Jesus;" or, as he says again, "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But, as then he that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless, what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bondwoman

and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not the children of the bondwoman, but of the free."

CHAPTER XV.

FURTHER LESSONS SUGGESTED BY ISHMAEL AND ISAAC—GOSPEL REST—APPEAL TO THE READER—THE SECRET OF COMING TO CHRIST “JUST AS I AM”—ABRAHAM AND SARAH AGAIN—HAGAR’S DEPARTURE—ABRAHAM AFRESH IN TROUBLE—TRUE EPITOME OF THE CHRISTIAN’S CAREER—THE TRIAL OF ABRAHAM’S FAITH—THE PECULIAR CHARACTER OF TRIAL—COMPARISON BETWEEN JOB’S AND ABRAHAM’S TRIALS—ABRAHAM’S TRIAL OF FAITH SO ADVERSE TO THE FLESH—REASON A FUNDAMENTAL POWER—GOD BOTH THE COUNSELLOR AND THE SUSTAINER OF HIS PEOPLE UNDER TRIAL—AN UNTRIED FAITH AN UNSAFE FAITH—ABRAHAM’S NON-CONFERENCE WITH FLESH AND BLOOD—GOD HONOURING THE FAITH HE GIVES.

WE have thus, reader, dwelt at some length upon the circumstances connected with Ishmael and Isaac, and the part Sarah took with respect to them, because so much touching our own personal salvation is involved in those circumstances. Had it been otherwise, the Apostle, so specially inspired as he was by the Holy Ghost, would not have dwelt so largely and so emphatically both upon the facts themselves and the teachings which those facts were intended to convey. There can be no realizing Gospel rest, nor a corresponding rejoicing in Christ, “as made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, yea, our all and in all,” until we are brought, as the Apostle has it, to “cease from our

own works, as God did from His." Then is it indeed found, and not until then, that "there remaineth a rest [or a keeping of Sabbath] to the people of God." And unspeakably blessed is the realization that, "being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Again, equally blessed is a personal apprehension of the fact, that "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made (us) free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin [or by a sacrifice for sin], condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

Reader, permit us to ask whether your eyes have been opened, and your understanding enlightened, and your heart so renewed, as to apprehend and receive these things? Sensible of your own fallen state and condition as a sinner, have you been led to discard self, to reject your own righteousness as of nothing worth—yea, as only "filthy rags"—and is the eye of faith fixed upon the person of Christ, and are His blood and His righteousness your only hope and your only plea? Can you from your heart, in godly sincerity and truth, say—

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me;
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!

"Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot;
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come!

"Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;
Sight, riches, healing of the mind;
Yea, all I need in Thee to find,
O Lamb of God, I come!

"Just as I am, Thy love unknown
Has broken ev'ry barrier down;
Now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come!"

With respect to the course pursued by Sarah, we are told that "the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight, because of his son." Yet in connexion therewith we are furnished with an additional proof of Jehovah's kindness and condescension; for so deeply interested was He in Abraham, and so tender and compassionate was His heart, that He at once recognized the sorrow with which His servant was oppressed; and hence we find that "God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman: in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called."

Here was divine sovereignty, or the expression of Jehovah's perfect right to do as seemeth good in His sight. Isaac was the child of promise, and in his

seed was to be the special blessing. The mercy bestowed upon Isaac and his seed was infinitely to exceed that given to Ishmael and his offspring. "Also," said Jehovah, "of the son of the bond-woman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed." Scarcely could a greater proof of divine condescension and mercy be given than in this one declaration, that Ishmael was to become a nation *because he was of the seed of Abraham*; but that privilege was confined to merely natural or time-things, and did not extend to spiritual or eternal blessings. And, in proof of Jehovah's regard for His word, and recognition of the relationship that existed between Abraham and Ishmael, we find that after Abraham had sent Hagar and her son away, and when the water wherewith she had been supplied was exhausted, and "she had cast the child under one of the shrubs," in order that she might not see him die, that "God heard the voice of the lad; and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink. And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer."

That prince of writers, Bunyan, says—

"The Christian man is never long at ease;
When one fright's gone, another doth him seize."

So Abraham, though a man of faith, found it. His faith did not exclude him from trial, but his faith would seem rather to make him a mark for trial. In him faith was to be most severely tested and tried, that so his history might be handed down to generation after generation as a pattern of faith.

We read, "And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt [that is, He tried or proved] Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham ! and he said, Behold, here I am."

This would seem to have been a striking feature of the patriarch's character. It was with the utmost promptitude he obeyed Jehovah's summons, when He called him out of Ur, of the Chaldees ; and that very readiness to hearken unto, and to obey the call of Jehovah, marked his after steps.

We admit that the satisfaction is immense, and the relief correspondingly great, when the voice of God is heard, and His will and pleasure made known. We know that whilst the soul is exercised with doubt and uncertainty as to what may be the precise mind of the Lord with respect to any particular path or course of action, how exceedingly anxious that state of mind is. Some positive loss or cross would appear almost if not altogether preferable to the perplexity or doubt, if so be that positive loss or cross were attended with a peculiar and unquestionable sense of its coming expressly from the hand of God, and with every mark and token of its being His holy mind and will. Thus the soul's aim and object is, not merely a cold submission to, but an entire

acquiescence with, that will. It seeks to realize that "the Judge of all the earth *must* do right;" and that which is now dark and obscure will be clearly and satisfactorily opened up and explained in His own time and way.

Abraham was about to undergo a severe trial—yea, the severest of trials. It is questionable whether a more critical or cutting test could have been proposed to him. Job's trials were great—his afflictions were of the keenest kind; but, complicated and manifold as they were, there is a sense at least in which his trials were less severe than that by which Abraham was to be tested. The very suddenness and singularity of Job's trials would bespeak them to be *of God*. They did not, upon the face of them, bear that impress which is so commonly to be discovered in relation to trial, "Hast thou not procured these things unto thyself?" Job's trials were not the immediate fruit and effect of his having "sown to the flesh;" although, we grant, there was a certain amount of pride and pharisaism about Job, which trial and affliction, as under the direction and control of Jehovah, was to be a means of discovering and rooting up. Had Job knowingly indulged in pride or self-complacency, or had those possessions of his which rendered him "the greatest of all the men of the East" been obtained in an avaricious, worldly, covetous spirit, there had then been ground for his suspecting that their very sudden removal was in fatherly rebuke and divine chastisement. Since, however, Jehovah Himself declared Job to be "an

upright man, one that feared God, and eschewed evil," we have no right to suppose that Job's trials were other than the exercise of divine sovereignty, for the exhibition of sustaining power, upholding grace, divine all-sufficiency, covenant faithfulness, and ultimately delivering mercy. Hence, as Job's afflictions came so signally from the hand of God, and, so to speak, in a way so apart from himself, and independently of his own doings, it seems the more natural that he should look to the Lord for support, and expect from the Lord succour and deliverance.

But, in the case of Abraham, there would appear to be a difference. He himself is called upon to take the prominent, the leading, yea, we may say, the sole part in the trial. For argument's sake, and in accordance with the remarks we have just advanced, we must for the moment seek to lose sight of God's calling upon Abraham to do what was to be done. The recognition of this fact, we grant, was what instrumentally sustained the patriarch. There is no disputing this for an instant. But, viewing the matter upon merely human grounds, how terrible was the task to which Abraham was called; and, if reason—man's boasted reason—man's idol of the present day—if reason were called for its opinion of the matter, to what conclusion could one come? But here stands the case. In the night season, it may be in a dream, or vision, or in waking moments when the patriarch had by a special power been roused from his slumbers, a voice accosts him,

“Abraham : and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac [mark, reader, he was the only son, according to promise] whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah ; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Here was a command, not only cutting at the root of all that was to verify and fulfil the promise, for so it ran, “In Isaac shall thy seed be called ;” but making Abraham not *a* party merely to it, but *the* very one, and only one, by which Isaac was to be cut off. His hand was to be in the matter. It was not God, as a Sovereign, taking away, as He had a perfect right to do, the gift He had bestowed. He was not thus and thus trying the faith and testing the submission of His servant, but it was putting that servant in the position (shall we say) of a murderer ? If not this, in all its extreme repulsiveness, may we not surmise that, as an idolator, coming from an idolatrous country, and personally familiar with idolatrous practices, was it not, in itself, and abstractedly considered, like leading Abraham to the heathenish and dark customs from which he had been so sovereignly and so effectually called ? Might not Abraham, upon these very principles, have argued with himself as to his having been mistaken in his conclusions, and that it could not be, in the very nature of things, that he was called to any such service ? Or, if perfectly clear, how remarkable would it appear that the man who had so recently been so fluent in argument and remonstrance with

respect to the destruction of the cities of the plain, should now be mute, have nought whatever to say, why the child upon whose existence such an immensity depended, should not be sacrificed, and that, too, by his own—a father's—hand?

These facts bespeak, in a remarkable and most conspicuous way, divine sustaining; and they clearly prove that when the Lord calls to a work, there He gives grace to sustain, and ability to perform. The very special mercy of Abraham, through the whole of this trial, was precisely that of which the Apostle Paul speaks, in after-day, with regard to himself. He says, when writing to the Galatians, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen, *immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood.*" So was it with Abraham; and, we ask, what would have been the consequence had either the patriarch or the Apostle done so? What would have been the advice given either by their own fleshly hearts, or by their own short-sighted fellow-creatures? What would or could reason have said to either question? And one cannot but feel that the same argument holds good in the great economy of salvation, and with respect to all, or nearly all, the Lord's leadings and teachings. "Blind unbelief," or men's mere carnal reason, or fleshly judgment and opinion, is

"sure to err,
And scan His work in vain;
God is His own Interpreter,
And *He* will make it plain."

Abraham was a man of faith ; he was emphatically called "the father of the faithful." That high dignity and honour was put upon him ; and the trial to which he was now called was at once for the testing and the establishing of that faith. Men talk of faith, and there is a great deal, in the professing world at least, that passes current for faith ; but it will not bear test or trial. When weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, everything but a God-wrought faith will be "found wanting."

In accordance with this non-conferring with flesh and blood, in reading this account of Abraham's trial of faith, one is ever wont to admire the promptitude with which he acted. Had he consulted with Sarah, or had he advised with his friends, or had he asked some of his faithful servants what they thought of the matter, how perplexed and harassed, and at a loss to know what to do, would he have been. But no ; because he "conferred not with flesh and blood ;" because *the Lord* had made his way plain ; because he would not turn tempter, and tempt the Lord as to whence this ?—why that ?—and how the other ?—he "rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him."

Hence it is certain that the Lord made the way very clear to the patriarch. He so wrought upon his mind, and so opened out His will, that Abraham was left in no state of doubt or uncertainty about the

course he was to pursue, the path he was to tread, the place towards which he was to direct his steps. And thus it is that the Lord, so to speak, communes with faith. It is not with our poor fleshly minds, as such, that the Lord confers, but specially and peculiarly with that heaven-begotten principle which He is pleased to implant and maintain. It is faith He gives—faith He nourishes—faith He honours; and, as it is written, “without faith it is impossible to please God.” Now we see how, step by step, and stage after stage, the Lord sustained and the Lord magnified the faith of the patriarch. We read, that “then”—then, as a matter of course—then, in precise keeping with the faith the Lord had given—“then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.” Even in this stage of the trial, how confirming must this have been to the faith of the patriarch. As the identical spot foreseen in vision was now brought vividly before him, who shall say what flowed into his heart?—how full the consciousness—how deep the sense—that what he was about to do was at the express command of God, and not in the leastwise to pander to or gratify the flesh. Whatever may have been Abraham’s reflections at this juncture, certain it is he experienced what all God’s servants under trial do experience, namely, that divine support and divine upholding which the fact of the “everlasting arms being underneath” ensures.

Oh, reader, this feature of divine discipline is a most grateful subject for contemplation. The

peculiar way in which the Lord does support His people, and console His people, under losses and crosses, troubles and trials, is marvellous. The infusion of strength—the calming of the mind—the whispering, “Fear thou not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness;” are all so specially of and from Himself, that the soul thus tried enters, even under the immediate weight and influence of the trial, into the sweet confidence of the Psalmist, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me; Thou shalt stretch forth Thy hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and Thy right hand shall save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.” And again, “Thou which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.”

Thus the Lord cheers the heart of His people, and, in the very depths of anguish and trouble, brings into sweet and lively exercise the faith He bestows. It is here faith operates, and here faith honours its great and glorious Author. Looking to Him—hoping in Him—venturing upon Him—expecting at His hands divine succour, divine sustaining, and, in due time, divine deliverance. Into these holy places—within these divine limitations—into these sacred mysteries, our poor fallen flesh, or mere creature sense and reason, cannot by any possibility intrude.

It is the "secret places of the stairs" through which and by which the Lord leads with tender hand and ever-vigilant eye His hidden ones. Here He communes with their spirits—here He opens up His love—here He unbosoms His heart—here in the wilderness He "speaks comfortably to His bride;" and here, under the precious influence of His words and ways, she sings,

"Boast not, ye sons of earth,
Nor look with scornful eyes;
Above your highest mirth,
My saddest hours I prize;
For, though my cup seems fill'd with gall,
A something secret sweetens all."

Reader, do you know anything of these things in rich and heartfelt experience? Can you follow Abraham with regard to some most unmistakable intimation that you were to take this or that—some long and dearly cherished good (idol, possibly it may have been)—and offer it up—relinquish it—sacrifice it, at the Lord's word, and for the Lord's sake? It has been like the plucking out of a right eye, or the cutting off of a right arm. It has been a sacrifice indeed—cutting to the last degree to poor frail humanity. What a wound! what a gash! what a severance! How piercing! how penetrating! What a rending asunder—a tearing away, as it were, the very chords of one's heart! And yet withal a secret sustaining—a divine upholding—a power by which to be enabled to exclaim, "It is the Lord; let *Him* do as seemeth *Him* good." Not a wish to have it

different. Pierced to the very heart's core, and yet kissing the hand that grasped the spear !

Ah, beloved, this is sweet *experience*—these are Bible lessons taught through *the heart*. This is that special way in which the Lord speaks home to the innermost soul ; and how precious is His voice even in the midst of the storm, and during the raging of the tempest.

“ And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass ; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”

When the Lord is about to lead His people into very special communion with Himself, neither He nor His can admit of any intruders. When Jesus, in the days of His flesh, was about to heal, we read of His “ taking ” the man about to be healed “ aside from the multitude ; ” and, when Jesus and His disciples were alone, He expounded unto them His parables, and opened out to them this and that secret of His heart. There is comparatively but little real worship in the crowd, amidst the throng. And, when there is worship there, it becomes, by the Lord the Spirit's own power, the speciality of worship. He individualizes, separates, distinguishes one here and another there, for the express purpose of personal communion. Hence how often is it seen that, amid the multitude, under the self-same sermon, uniting in the self-same song of praise, it is one here and another there “ whose heart the Lord opens.” It is such an one under this trial, and such an one under that temptation ; or one in perplexity here, or another

in affliction there, to whom the word is applied—in whose heart the Gospel message finds entrance; and, the truth coming “not in word only, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,” there is instantly the realization of the most privileged communion. There is a being caught up on high—off and away from all the trial and the turmoil of earth—an entrance into the third heavens—and a foretaste of that unspeakable blessedness which “eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.” The trial then, however momentous before, sinks into utter insignificance. Mountains become molehills; troubles of hugest size before, dwindle into merest trifles now. Enemies are viewed in the light of friends, especially if their threats, or taunts, or efforts to irritate or injure, have in any wise been instrumental in driving to a throne of grace, and drawing thence a blessing. Oh, how such are thanked for the good service they have thus unintentionally rendered!

Reader, again permit us to pause, to ask if you know anything of this experience; or are you at present pressed down under the weight of care or anxiety? or have your enemies so vexed and so irritated and laid such things to your charge, as that you have felt too much borne down, or too indignant at the groundlessness of the charge, to seek help and consolation from on high? Well will it be for you, under such circumstances, to flee to the throne, and to seek to roll your burden on the Lord. Blessed will you feel it to be to appeal to Him—to sympa-

thize with your Lord and Master in regard to the many false charges which were brought against Him. Thus occupied, you will find, ere you are aware, how sweetly by the Spirit's power and might you are led to have "fellowship with Him in His sufferings:" and you will testify that you

"At most but *taste* the cup,
Which He alone had drunk quite up."

But is there not something more involved in the expression of the patriarch, "And come again to you?" Have we not a right to suppose that by some special conviction he was led to believe that God would, in a way known alone to Himself, appear, and that Isaac should in very deed be restored to him? Nay, are we not fully justified in coming to this conclusion by the express comment which the Holy Ghost, through the Apostle Paul, has offered upon this act of the patriarch? "By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only-begotten son; of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; *from whence also he received him in a figure.*"

Now, whether or not the patriarch believed that in very deed Isaac would be sacrificed, there cannot be a doubt of his assurance that he would be *restored*; and probably there was with that conviction an insight afforded unto Abraham of the nature and reality of the resurrection, of which he had previously

been in comparative ignorance. Whether this were so or not, certain it is that times of trial are those in which the Lord does, in a very special way, open out the secrets of His heart to His beloved ones. Trouble-spots are, spiritually, the sunny spots of the wilderness; each such trouble-spot becomes, through divine communication and indulgence, an oasis in the desert.

“And Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.”

Reader, see you not here a significant type of both God the Father and God the Son? By the prophet Isaiah, we read, “It pleased the Lord to bruise him; He hath put him to grief;” and then with respect to our glorious Christ, we read, “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.”

But now, if we mistake not, the climax of Abraham’s trial comes. We do not consider it was till the very last extremity that climax was delayed; neither are we of opinion that it is usually so with respect to the Lord’s testing the faith of His children that the crisis is deferred till the utmost extremity of the trial, as far as that trial is to be judged by appearances. The Lord is too mindful of His people for this; He is too sensible of both their weakness and their wants to defer strength and withhold communication until they are in the very extreme of

danger. We know that there is at times apparently "but a step betwixt them and death;" but, for most part, we believe there is the communication of help before there is the consummation of trial. This is afforded in various ways. Sometimes the Lord *forearms* when he *forewarns*. For example, before that Peter so grossly and grievously denied his Lord, Jesus said to him, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee, that he may sift thee as wheat: but I have prayed the Father for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Now, though this caution on the part of the Lord did not so operate on Peter's mind as to prevent his fall, yet there cannot be a doubt that that very admonition became subsequently a source of real comfort to the Apostle's mind. He knew that his Lord and Master had prayed for him that his faith might not fail; and he knew, moreover, from the Lord's own intimation of the fact, that he should be "converted," or restored. Imagine what would have been the state of the Apostle's mind, when as it was "he went out and *wept bitterly*," if so be he had not had that prior intimation of the Lord's goodness and compassion towards him. Hence, we say, this was a feature or phase of the Lord's administering succour *before* the utmost extremity of the trial, absolutely considered; hence that communication detracts proportionately from the severity of the trial.

Take another example. A kind friend or relative is laid low by affliction. Deep is the anxiety aroused

thereby. A throne of grace is resorted to; God's holy mind and will is sought in connexion therewith. There is no reply—no assurance, "This affliction is not unto death." The malady progresses—disease gradually but effectually reduces the frame—significant are the tokens that the days of the afflicted one are numbered; but, in proportion as that afflicted one is brought lower and lower, it may be said of the sympathizing friend or relative, "He brought down their heart with labour." By degrees are such reconciled to the stroke. By little and little they see and admit even the *necessity* for a separation. However adverse at first, sooner or later they say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord." Conceive of their being without such a preparation. Imagine that friend or relative to have died suddenly, or to have been cut off by what men call accident; how different, and how additionally painful, the case. Yea, so merciful is the Lord to His creatures—even to His creatures as such, not to His children merely—that how often do we hear one and another exclaim with regard to some calamity or so-called accident, "Well, I had a foreboding that something was about to happen." Now this is the Lord, even in the common exercise of His providence, *preparing* the individual for what He is about to do.

In the case of Abraham, we believe that, at the very critical juncture to which we are about to allude, Jehovah did, in a most special and peculiar way, communicate with Abraham, infusing into his mind,

if not by express words, yet by express power, a holy confidence in His wisdom, grace, and strength, and immediately coupling with that an enlarged, a glorious, an unspeakably satisfactory view of the great sacrifice which in the fulness of time was to be offered.

“And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?”

Now, upon the principle we have just laid down, we believe that *this*—and not the later moment when “Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son”—was the real climax of the trial. “But where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?” Oh, the heart-harrowing appeal! oh, the intensity of the anguish enkindled thereby! In one aspect of the case, what in comparison with this was the distress of David when he “went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!” Absalom, though cut off in signal judgment, died by another’s hand, but Isaac was to die by the hand of his own father! It is right, on the one hand, to reflect upon all that was involved in what the patriarch was called upon to do. He was a father, and, as a father, had all the tenderness of parental feelings. It is clear that the Holy Ghost meant this to appear by the very way—the touching way—in which both the appeal and the answer are given.

"My father!" said Isaac. "My son!" said Abraham. And does not the very way in which Isaac appealed to his father bespeak that that father was at the very moment in pensive musing? Without doubt, every step he took, as he neared the end of that fearfully momentous journey, his heart throbbed with intensity of emotion; and it was only as he was enabled by grace divine to persist in his non-conferring with flesh and blood, he realized anything of that unruffled calm—that blessed stayedness of the mind upon God—which it is the precious privilege of faith to realize.

It was at this most critical of junctures that relief was imparted to the mind of the patriarch. "And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering: so they went both of them together." As already intimated, we believe that not only did Abraham, from that moment especially, believe that God would appear for him, and that either before or after Isaac had been sacrificed, but he saw also the offering up of the great anti-typical sacrifice in later day. Of that moment, it might most peculiarly be said, "Abraham saw my day; he saw it, and was glad." "God will provide HIMSELF a lamb"—yea, the Lord Christ, the second Person in the ever-adorable Trinity, was Himself "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

CHAPTER XVI.

ABRAHAM'S ASSURANCE OF SUCCOUR—THE NATURE OF FAITH—ITS BLESSEDNESS—APPEAL TO THE READER—THE SENTENCE OF DEATH—PLEADING WITH GOD IN THE FACE OF DIFFICULTIES AND DISCOURAGEMENTS—THE REALITY OF ABRAHAM'S TRIAL—THE SINCERITY OF HIS SERVICE—THE TIMELINESS OF THE LORD'S INTERPOSING HAND—"MAN'S EXTREMITY GOD'S OPPORTUNITY"—ALL PRAISE DUE TO JEHOVAH—ABRAHAM'S FOREVIEW OF CHRIST, AND INSIGHT INTO REDEMPTION—MODERN INFIDELITY—THE HUMBLING NATURE OF DIVINE GRACE.

IN our last chapter we considered Abraham brought, as we conceived, to the climax of his trial, in so far as intense soul-travail was concerned. That touching inquiry of Isaac, "Where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?" brought matters as it were to an issue; and, in the most timely and gracious way, God enabled Abraham promptly to reply, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt-offering." We are of opinion that from that moment Abraham had the fullest conviction that he should be aided and delivered. He knew not how; nor is it always, or commonly, the pleasure of God to show the how until the very latest extremity. Sufficient is it for faith to know that the Lord will deliver—the *when* and the *how* faith is con-

tented to leave with Him who secretly and sacredly says, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." We say sacredly, for there is no position more sacred or more blessed than the waiting, expectant posture: the soul in the depths of trouble, yet in the attitude of hope and expectation whilst looking to the Lord, and reminding Him of His word, "And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good."

Reader, do you know anything of this blessed experience? Have you thus realized the extreme sweetness and satisfaction of the mercy of going as it were into the very holy of holies, and there holding converse—rich communion—with your Father-God, in the person and through the fulness of a precious Christ; all things outwardly so operating as to produce "the sentence of death in yourself" of which the Apostle speaks in his second epistle to the Corinthians, and yet at the same time so ordered of God as both to drive you and to draw you to Him as your only help, and staff, and stay? Oh, how blessed is this going in before the King, which is not according to the law, but according to that new and living way which a precious Christ hath opened to us by His own blood. Oh, to know more and more of this distinguishing privilege. Oh, to live day by day, and moment by moment, in the sweet exercise thereof. Oh, for trial, and trouble, and temptation, so to work, under the gracious management, direction, and control of the Holy Ghost, as to bring

about this most desirable end and object. Then indeed shall we increasingly feel how good it is to be afflicted. Then shall we know, and increasingly realize, that "though no affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby."

"And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood."

Mark the emphasis, reader, "*the place.*" God never deceives, nor does He disappoint. God was the prime Mover throughout. All was under *His* direction and control; and, since He began, He would carry on, and He in due time complete. Here, beloved, is our mercy, in all that God commands or calls for. Abraham's faith is still unshaken. There is no drawing back, much less refusal to obey. Distinctly, definitely, and, without doubt, most dependingly, he followed the divine leadings, step by step; he built the altar—he laid the wood in order—he bound Isaac his son—he laid him upon the altar on the wood. What, no appearance yet? no interposition? None whatever! Is Abraham in haste? Should he not tarry? May not a pause be desirable? Nay, that tarrying, that pause, under the circumstances, would denote a want of faith. It would be feigning—it would be hypocritical, inasmuch as it would savour of merely playing a part. The service must be an intentional service—a hearty service—a

service in which even a God could trace no defects; for

“God abhors the sacrifice
Where not *the heart* is found.”

Every true spiritual worshipper is imbued deeply and essentially with the truth expressed by the Psalmist, “Thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom.” Now comes the crisis, as far as the service was concerned: “And Abraham stretched forth his hand;” what for? to *assume*—to *pretend*—to do that which he was called upon to do? Nay, this would have been to neutralize, and to render completely valueless, all that he had done before. This would have been to mock Jehovah. This would have been to trifle with Him who is jealous of His honour and His name and His acts to the last degree. “Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife,” but it was expressly at God’s command, “to slay his son.” He had God’s warrant—God’s express direction—so to do. Here was his only answer to all the scruples of his own heart, and all the objections of others. He had nought else to fall back upon but the express word of the Lord. Why thus called to act he knew not. Why he should thus go in express opposition to all the dictates of sense, reason, and human kindness, he could not define. Why he should be guilty of an act which, as far as appearances went, would frustrate Jehovah’s express declaration, that “in Isaac should all the families of the earth be blessed,” it was not for him to determine. One argument—and

one alone—weighed with him,—that what he did he was called upon by God to do. Here was his only stay ; here, and here alone, his consolation.

But now, reader, mark the beautiful illustration of that precious truth—

“’Tis just in the last distressing hour
Our God displays delivering power ;
The mount of danger is the place
Where we shall see surprising grace.”

“ And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham : and he said, Here am I.” Who could this be but the Angel of the everlasting covenant, the Lord Christ Himself, who had engaged in the fulness of time to undergo in His own person that which Abraham was, as results proved, only typifying ? “ And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him : for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.” The Lord “knew” before who Abraham was, and what his object and intention, for “He knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit ;” but the Lord’s purpose was, that others should know as well as Himself, and that throughout all ages this act of loving, self-denying obedience on the part of Abraham should be promulgated.

Do you not see, reader, that if the Lord had vouchsafed deliverance one moment before, that deliverance would not have been nearly so conspicuous ? As it was, it proved so much more richly, and definitely, His watchfulness—His condescension—His

kindly, tender interest. Not for an instant did He overlook Abraham, nor was He in the leastwise unmindful of the service to which he was called, or the circumstances in which that call had placed him. He had marked his progress—He had scrupulously watched his every step—He knew precisely the workings of his mind; nor did He overlook the moment in which it was absolutely necessary that He should stretch forth His delivering hand, and impart an aid which should be as sacred as it was seasonable.

Reader, if you know the Lord, or anything of His gracious dealings, have you not been the subject of the self-same watchfulness and timely interposing grace and love? Have you not proved the truth of the old saying, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity?" And why this, but that His wisdom, love, and power should be the more distinctly recognized and acknowledged? The heart of man is so proud and self-sufficient, that he will not render to God the praise and the glory due to Him, but as by force of circumstances compelled so to do. Whensoever and wheresoever the human heart can take credit to itself, it will; that is, it will *assume* a right to do so. Hence pride must be crushed, and the creature humbled, by positive matter-of-fact evidence that, unless the Lord had wrought, defeat or absolute destruction must have been the consequence. Moreover, forgetful as we are even with respect to the Lord's most signal mercies and most marvellous interpositions, how needful does it become, even upon these grounds, that the Lord should work in such a way as to leave

no doubt or question whatever about His being the wisdom—His the grace—His the power, by which we have been helped and delivered. Though so conspicuous, and though so gracious, yet, alas! alas! how prone are we to allow His mercies to

“Lie buried in forgetfulness,
And without praises die.”

Next follows in Abraham's case that marvellous insight into redemption with which he was favoured. “And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt-offering in the stead of his son.” Thus was the grand doctrine of substitution and atonement opened out to him in all its fulness and unspeakable satisfaction. In that ram he saw in lively type and figure Him who, in the fulness of time, was to come, “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;” Him who was to “bear our griefs, carry our sorrows;” Him who was to be “stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted;” Him who was to be “wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was to be upon Him, and with His stripes we were to be healed.” “All we like sheep having gone astray; we having turned every one to his own way; the Lord (margin) made the iniquities of us to meet upon Him.” He was to be “oppressed, and He afflicted; yet He would not open His mouth: He

was to be brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so would He open not His mouth. He was to be taken from prison and from judgment, and who should declare His generation? for He was to be cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of His people was He to be stricken. He was to make His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; because (says the prophet) He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth. Yet (he adds) it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. liii. 3—12).

Again, whilst the patriarch was favoured with this clear apprehension of the nature of the divine mystery of the Lord Christ becoming incarnate, and that in the covenant line proceeding from his own loins, how correspondingly deep must have been his insight into the nature of sin, calling as it did for so great a sacrifice as none less than the Son of God.

Again, how enlarged must have been his conception of that infinitude of love which prompted the Father not to withhold His Son—His dearly-beloved and only-begotten Son—but freely give Him up for us all. Intense as had been his solicitude, deep as must have been his anguish, in the prospect of having to surrender—and that by his own personal sacrifice—his dearly-loved Isaac, yet, when it came to extremities, he was spared the agony which such a sacrifice must necessarily have produced; not so God the Father. Christ must be sacrificed—not in type, not in figure merely; not simply by willingness, or mental acquiescence, as was the case with Abraham. No such sacrifice as this could suffice. It must be an offering—a sacrifice—that was absolute. The altar must not only be built—the Victim chosen, bound, and laid upon it, but that Victim must die, for “without the shedding of blood, there is no remission.”

“Die, man, or Justice must.”

“Said Justice, ‘Man, I’d feign know what you weigh;
If weight, I spare you; if too light, I slay.’
Man leap’d the scale; it mounted, on my word.
Said Justice, ‘Less than nothing! where’s my sword?’
Virtue was there, and her small weight would try.
The scale unsunk, still kick’d the beam on high.
Mercy (the whitest dove that ever flew)
From Calvary quickly fetch’d a twig of crimson hue;
Aloft it sent the scale on th’ other side:
Man smil’d, and Justice own’d, ‘I’m satisfied.’”

Reader, no subject can be of more importance, especially in the days in which we live, than the having a

true scriptural view of the nature of the atonement. This, coupled with a faith's apprehension of a personal interest therein, can alone afford peace and satisfaction amid all the trials and afflictions and perplexities of life: much less can anything short of this produce a holy calm and divine serenity in the article of death and the immediate prospect of an entrance upon a never-ending eternity. Reader, be it your mercy and our own to be divinely preserved from drinking any of the deadly poison prepared by philosophic minds (as the Apostle says falsely so called), and sought to be administered by men who, at the expense of the simple testimony of Scripture, of divine inspiration, would set up human reason and the power of their poor finite understanding as the alone standard of action, either with respect to things human or divine.

Such men would altogether ignore the testimony of the Apostle Paul, who, in writing to the Corinthians, refined and educated though they were, hesitated not to declare, in his memorable and emphatic epistle to that Church, "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the Gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God

the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. i. 17—31).

CHAPTER XVII.

ABRAHAM'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD—HIS ENDEARING NAME JEHOVAH-JIREH—DIVINE FAITHFULNESS—DIVINE OMNISCIENCE—A WELL-ORDERED COVENANT—PLEADING WITH GOD—DIVINE ENLARGEMENTS—THE RETRACINGS OF GOODNESS AND MERCY—SPECIAL TRIALS AND SPECIAL DELIVERANCES.

ANOTHER most important and equally encouraging lesson which sprang out of the circumstances in which the patriarch was placed, and which have occupied our thoughts in the preceding chapters, was the clearer insight which he had been privileged to attain as to the character of God. Hence, after the wondrous scenes which he had been permitted to witness, and in which he had been privileged—we use the word advisedly—to take so conspicuous a part, we are told that “Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-Jireh,” that is, “The Lord will see or provide.”

How consolatory, we say, is this truth, supported as it is by so striking a display of loving, gracious, fatherly interest as that shown on the part of Jehovah towards Abraham. This cheering, soul-animating truth is reflected as with a sunbeam upon each and every part of that self-denying service to which

Abraham was called. Not in any one particular is there the very semblance of divine forgetfulness or indifference, when viewed in connexion with the faith Jehovah had implanted, and the trial to which He was pleased now sovereignly to subject it. All betokens watchfulness, care, the deepest, most profound regard. All bespeaks upon the part of Jehovah a stake and an interest of inconceivable weight and magnitude: such a stake and such an interest as could not, of necessity, allow Him to be indifferent or unconcerned. And condescendingly and graciously the Lord continues to place Himself in such a position with regard to His Church and people. He says to them, "O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me;" again He says of them, "In that day sing ye unto her, A vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day" (Isa. xxvii. 2, 3).

Moreover, as the Lord would in that early day, and in connexion with the special circumstances in which His servant had been placed, perpetuate this most consolatory truth of His being "Jehovah-Jireh," it is added, "as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen." As much as to tell us, that whenever and wherever the Lord sees fit to call His people into trial and affliction; that whensoever and wheresoever it pleaseth Him to subject them to the special exercise of a course of self-denial, in relation to His fatherly teaching and discipline, they shall specially and peculiarly realize Him in very

deed to be "Jehovah-Jireh,"—the Lord seeing all—sustaining under all—and providing against all. The very name is so comprehensive. There is nothing which it does not embrace. Every position, every state, every circumstance, is wisely, lovingly, graciously taken into account. Consequently, if we belong to the Lord, and are interested in that covenant which the Psalmist declared to be "ordered in *all* things, and sure," we may cast ourselves upon Him who still stands—and ever will stand—revealed to His people as Jehovah-Jireh. In precise keeping with this testimony of the patriarch is Jehovah's own declaration, "I AM THAT I AM." Hence, upon the same ground of holy confidence and childlike dependence, His own dear people may go before Him with pleas, and entreaties, and importunities based upon His own covenant revelation of Himself—"I AM THAT I AM." So that they may say, "And, since Thou hast thus revealed Thyself, dearest Lord, I, a poor worm of the earth—just one of those to whom Thou hast so graciously promised to look, and on whose behalf Thou hast pledged Thyself to appear, be pleased to vouchsafe Thy help; bestow Thy grace; make bare Thine holy arm, and come forth anew in those gracious and merciful deliverances of which I stand so much in need. Be mindful of Thy promise. 'Do as Thou hast said.' 'Remember the word unto Thy servant upon which Thou hast caused me to hope.' 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' Let the very difficulty in which I am placed—the very temptation with which I am assailed—the very

death that hangs upon my heart—the seeming impossibility for anything again to cheer, revive, animate my spirit; let any or all of these varied sources of perplexity or pain prove to be only a special means in Thy hand, O Lord, for the renewed exercise of Thy wisdom, grace, and power. Grant, in relation thereto, that such exercises and trials may be but another means by which Thou dost prove that Thou ‘givest songs in the night,’ and that thus Thou ‘dost revive us again, in order that Thy people may rejoice in Thee.’ ”

Reader, again, we are bound to testify that this name of “Jehovah-Jireh” in the realization is most God-glorifying and Christ-endearing. Oh, how sweet is it when, after seasons, it may be, of peculiar depression—a state of death-like indifference to all or upon all—or an encountering of vicissitudes and trials under which the Lord alone could support, and from which He, and He only, could extricate; how sweet, we say, in the review to have personal grounds for declaring that He has proved Himself to be “Jehovah-Jireh,” in one’s own particular case and circumstances; giving one to exclaim, out of the fulness of one’s heart, “Blessed be the Lord, because He hath heard the voice of my supplications. The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him” (Psalm xxviii. 6, 7). Reader, can you sympathize in these remarks? Have you proved the truth of this statement in your own individual case? If so, you

will rejoice in that the Lord has declared Himself in terms which prove at once an exhortation and an encouragement for your approaching Him at all times and under all circumstances.

Furthermore, in regard to the patriarch, how condescending and how gracious was it of the Lord to renew the assurances of His goodwill and favour towards him; for we read, "And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

Reader, rest assured that when, as in Abraham's case, the Lord calls to some very special act of surrender and self-denial, He does afterwards the more plainly and the more forcibly vouchsafe tokens and indications of His peculiar love and condescending grace and mercy. If the trial is to be special, the deliverance shall be equally special; if the temptation is keen, the Lord's manifestation, in His own time and way, shall be the more conspicuous and blessed, leaving the soul in no state of doubt or surmise as to who has been its Sustainer, and who in due time its De-

liverer. Hence shall the individual so led and so instructed exclaim, in the fulness and gratitude of his heart—

“What shall I render to my God
For all He has bestow'd?
Salvation's sacred cup I'll take,
And call upon my God.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

OUR MORTALITY—ABRAHAM'S SORROW IN RELATION TO THE DEATH OF SARAH—THE CHANGE IN OUR MORTAL BODIES EFFECTED BY DEATH—THE LORD'S INTEREST IN THE DUST OF HIS PEOPLE—VICTORY OVER DEATH AND THE GRAVE—ANTICIPATION, A PROOF OF THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL—JEHOVAH, IN HIS TRINITY OF PERSONS, ENGAGED TO RAISE HIS PEOPLE FROM THE DEAD—SCRIPTURE TESTIMONY—THE HEART-CHEERING EFFECTS OF THE WORD OF GOD WHEN APPLIED BY THE SPIRIT.

A FACT is mentioned in the next chapter—the 23rd of Genesis—that may well remind us, not only of our own mortality, but of what is so commonly seen in the Scriptures, as well as confirmed in daily life: it is the change—the fluctuation—that intermingling of joy and sorrow, which are so characteristic of the present state. A few years only after the striking circumstances narrated in the previous chapter had rolled over Abraham's head, ere the companion of his protracted pilgrimage was taken from him. Loved as she was of God, and privileged as she had been to be the bearer of the child of promise, hers was to be no exception to the universal rule: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Nothing can be more humbling, yet nothing more true. And, though Abraham was declared to be the "father of

the faithful," and had so high a dignity set upon him as to be pronounced "the friend of God;" yea, God condescended so marvellously as, in speaking of him and his seed, to say, "the seed of Abraham, my friend;" yet he in his own person was to know what it was to be bereaved—what it was to have "the delight of his eyes taken away with a stroke." He was to know, in common with the whole human family, what it was to endure anguish and grief inexpressible, in connexion with the taking away of those at once near and dear. We read, "And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her." There is something very emphatic in the statement in the next verses: "And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight." "Abraham stood up from before his dead;" as if, after yielding to the promptings of his bereaved and desolated heart, in floods of weeping, he sees in the already altered aspect of the lifeless body over which he wept, a something that said, "Weep not for the dead, nor for (her) that goes away." "Why seek ye the living among the dead? (she) is not here, but is risen." Her triumphant spirit now soars aloft, and mingles with the spirits of just men made perfect. This is but the casket; the jewel is safely deposited in Jehovah's bosom. How touching, moreover, the request, "that I may bury

my dead out of my sight." How humbling the consideration, and what a sad indication of the baneful consequences of sin and transgression, that those once so lovely in our esteem should, ere the breath has long left the body, become, first, objects of dread, and then, if buried not, objects of disgust. What so fills the mind with awe as the sight of a corpse, and what, after but a very short interval, becomes so repulsive? Even Abraham could no longer endure the sight.

But whilst Sarah was called "his dead" and "my dead," there is something most cheering in the thought, that she was *the Lord's dead* also. Yea, it is written that "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." And, though there is that in them which calls, as a matter both of necessity and chastisement, that they should return to the earth whence they came, and though the ordeal of decay becomes one from which our poor nature recoils, not only personally but relatively, yet, since the bodies of the saints are as much redeemed as their souls, Jesus, to whom they belong, and of whose mystic body they form essentially and indissolubly a part, watches over their sleeping, mouldering forms with a special tenacity and an indescribably glorious interest. Decay they must, but destroyed never! Into tiniest atoms they may moulder—dust, dust, absolutely may characterize their condition whilst occupants of the grave, and whilst mouldering beneath the clods of the valley; still this decaying, dissolving ordeal affects not the promise, "Thy dead men shall

live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead" (Isa. xxvi. 19). "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. xv. 52—57). Again we hear, by the mouth of the same Apostle, the most comforting assurance, for, in writing to the Thessalonians, he says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him" (1 Thes. iv. 13, 14). Hence, whilst there is everything in the abstract, or in itself considered, to make death repulsive and forbidding, it is greatly otherwise when viewed in its connexion with the full and final severance of the body from its long and burdensome tenant, *sin*. Whilst, on the one hand, in the contemplation of death, we may exclaim—

“And must this body die?
This mortal frame decay?
And must these active limbs of mine
Lie mouldering in the clay?”

yet, on the other hand, we may rejoice also in the fact, that

“Corruption, earth, and worms
Shall but refine this flesh,
Till my triumphant spirit comes
To put it on afresh.”

Now the lesson which we are taught by the position of Abraham at this time, is the uncertain tenure of every human pleasure and delight. Upon everything beneath the sun is endorsed, “This also is vanity.” No human friendship—no relationship, however near or dear—no earthly position, however elevated, but bears the stamp of “vanity.” All below is vain and unsatisfactory. There is engrafted in our very being a something which bespeaks the fact, that “here we have no continuing city—that this is not our rest;” that continuous looking forward and reaching after a something yet unattained, bespeaks an immortality of being which no vain sophistry or arguments of men can deny. Understand it they may not; the denial of it is a virtual denial of an essential law of their very existence. But, whilst the sceptic or the infidel thus as it were contradicts his being and warps his conscience by seeking to crush that which his Creator has implanted as a significant monitor, the child of God may rejoicingly construe these

self-same matters into so many gracious indications of what his gracious God and Father has given as a lively token of what is His pleasure concerning him ; that He would have him with Him—to live and reign in blessed companionship through eternal day. It is his mercy to construe what the worldling would deem the restlessness and dissatisfaction of his nature into so many inward, heaven-inspired leadings and promptings to be looking and marching forward, and onward, and homeward. The exile longing for home ; the pilgrim pressing to his journey's end ; the mariner welcoming the gale that drives him towards the haven where he would be ; the prisoner sighing for his liberty ; the child counting the weeks and days that terminate his school career.

But may we not add, as an antidote against the fear of death, that imperishable interest which Jehovah has in His redeemed ones, and by virtue of which He is, in addition to His covenant pledge and eternal engagement, bound to bring them safe home to Himself ? This interest is in unison with all the Three Persons in the ever-adorable Trinity. This interest exists in the bosom of the Father ; hence Jesus exclaimed, in the 17th chapter of St. John's Gospel, "I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest me out of the world : Thine they were, and Thou gavest them me ; and they have kept Thy word." Again He says, "I pray for them : I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me ; for they are Thine. And all mine are Thine, and Thine are mine ; and I am

glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Again, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me: for Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." Thus the gracious interest of the Father in the persons of the redeemed is clear, and beyond all scruple or doubt. Hence, by virtue of this His covenant interest in them, they cannot but be everlastingly delivered from the bondage of death, hell, and the grave. Again, we have in the 14th chapter of the same epistle, the words of Jesus as addressed specifically to His disciples, in which He declares plainly and emphatically the purposes of His

eternal mind : "Let not your heart be troubled : ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." But not only upon the ground of His own covenant promise is the security of the believer verified and confirmed, but likewise from the very nature of that indissoluble union in which the redeemed stand to Christ. In the same epistle of John, Christ testifies, "I am the vine, ye are the branches : he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit : for without me ye can do nothing" (John xv. 5). In the last four verses of the 2nd chapter of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians, the Apostle affirms, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God ; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone ; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord : in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." In the same epistle the Apostle sets forth the union of Christ and His members as that of husband and wife : "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it ; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious

Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church" (Eph. v. 25—32). Again the same Apostle, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, shows forth this same union of Christ with His people under the figure of head and members; hence he says, "Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ: whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the

resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order : Christ the firstfruits ; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming. Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father ; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For He hath put all things under His feet. But when He saith all things are put under Him, it is manifest that He is excepted, which did put all things under Him " (1 Cor. xv. 12—27). Further, the absolute identity of Christ with His members is shown most sweetly in respect to the conversion of St. Paul, for we read in the 9th of the Acts, "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus : and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven : and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ? And he said, Who art Thou, Lord ? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest : it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Thus Christ recognized the persecution of His members as the persecution of Himself. Again, in Christ's own description of the

last judgment, we have His own words in vindication of this great truth: "When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison,

and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matt. xxv. 31—46).

We have not merely referred to these several passages, but have quoted them at length, because of their vast importance, and in order that the reader might not be tempted to pass on without distinct and special reference to the scriptures themselves. We want, in this our humble volume, the most direct reference to be made "to the word and to the testimony: if they speak not according to these, it is because there is no light in them."

We said, however, that the Spirit (the third Person in the adorable Trinity) was pledged also for the bringing off the redeemed victorious over every foe. In speaking of the Holy Ghost, Christ said, "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John xiv. 16, 17). The Apostle Paul also, whilst speaking of the indwelling of the Spirit, declares, in the 8th chapter of his epistle to the Romans, and the 11th verse, "But if the Spirit

of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you." Then, as if to sum up all in the strongest and most emphatic terms, he asks, in the closing up of that same chapter, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Thus, reader, we have seen from God's own word, how each and all of the blessed Persons in the adorable Trinity are pledged for the security, the complete deliverance, and the everlasting glorification of the redeemed.

Now a knowledge of this, as based upon the divine record, and sealed home upon the heart and conscience by the Revealer and Testifier of Christ, God the Holy Ghost, will raise us above all our gloomy fears and apprehensions; and, in proportion as this saving faith is in exercise, we shall look not at ourselves, nor at the things by which we are surrounded, but we shall learn to look, as the Apostle testified, "Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. iv. 14—18).

CHAPTER XIX.

THE FEAR OF DEATH SO COMMON AMONG THE PEOPLE OF GOD—THIS FEAR DISTINCTLY ALLUDED TO BY THE APOSTLE IN HIS EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS—THE WORK OF CHRIST IN REFERENCE TO THIS FEAR—THE GROUNDLESSNESS OF THIS FEAR WHEN CHRIST IS DULY APPREHENDED IN HIS DIVINE PERSON AND WORK—CHRIST THE FORERUNNER OF HIS PEOPLE IN REGARD TO THIS FEAR—CHRIST A LEARNER—CHRIST A CONQUEROR OF SIN, DEATH, AND HELL—HIS PEOPLE MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH AND BY HIM.

WE dwelt a little in our last chapter upon the fear of death, and endeavoured to show, upon the ground of Jehovah's covenant engagements, in His threefold character, why there was no real cause for the believer's being the subject of this fear. And yet it is so natural—so few, comparatively speaking, of the children of God but what are, more or less, the subjects of this fear—that it makes us additionally anxious to dwell a little more upon this point, hoping as we do that the Lord may, in mercy, make what we may be led to write instrumental in cheering the heart and dispelling the fears of those who may thus suffer.

Now, by reference to the epistle to the Hebrews, we find that one part—and an essential part, too—of

the work of Christ, was to meet the condition of those who were the subjects of the fear of death. In the 2nd of the Hebrews and 10th verse, it says: "For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Again, in the 8th and 9th verses of the same chapter, it is recorded: "Thou hast put all things in subjection under His feet. For in that He put all things in subjection under Him, He left nothing that is not put under Him. But now we see not yet all things put under Him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man." God forbid that we should say anything derogatory to the name and honour of our most glorious Christ; but is it not clear, that, when Jesus the mighty God—one with the Father and the eternal Spirit, co-equal and co-eternal—left His throne in glory, and came here below to tabernacle in our flesh, "made of a woman, made under the law, that He might redeem them that were under the law," He took upon Him our sinless infirmities? Yea, more, He placed Himself in the position of a learner; for so it is written, "Though He were a Son (or the Son of the eternal God), yet *learned* He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect." How! the immaculate Son of God made perfect? Not perfect as implying imperfection in His nature, because if He were in

the leastwise tainted with sin, He could not offer a vicarious sacrifice. He must offer for Himself, and not absolutely and exclusively for the sins of His people, as their Daysman, Substitute, and Redeemer. But He was "made perfect" in the accomplishment, development, and opening out of His mediatorial and substitutionary character, in His covenant engagements to *do* as well as to *suffer* for and on the behalf of His people. Christ was not only to *die*, but to *live* for His people here in the time-state. He was to *serve* as well as to *suffer*. He was to work out, actively, a righteousness which is "unto all and upon all them that believe," according to that glorious testimony, "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 3, 4). But He was to *die* also—here was His *passive* obedience. He was to die even the ignominious death of the cross, in order in His own person, and by His own offering, to atone for—yea, to "perfect for ever them that are sanctified." Hence Christ, in the accomplishment of His work, was "made perfect," as a Saviour. As He Himself declared, when addressing His Father, "I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do."

Now with regard to death, the Apostle distinctly affirms, "The sting of death is sin, and the strength

of sin is the law." Hence an essential part of the work of Christ was to destroy death—that is, so to divest it of strength and power as to render it harmless. And such, we contend, is the case, as far as the redeemed are concerned. This, we pray God, He will enable us to prove from His own precious word. Speaking by the prophet Hosea, the Lord says, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes" (Hosea xiii. 14). Then with respect to His being "made perfect," or the carrying into execution His own pre-ordained work, we read in the last five verses of the 2nd of the Hebrews: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but he took on Him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted."

We ask, therefore, what was involved in this work? What had Christ to undergo in the accomplishment of it? We answer that, though He had no sin *in*

Him (we have already shown that had He not been "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," His work would have been neutralized), yet He had sin *upon* Him. He stood beneath the ponderous weight, and became wholly and solely responsible for the sin and the condemnation of His redeemed. He stood accountable for them. He pledged Himself to be answerable for them. He sought their entire and eternal discharge upon the ground of His own service and sacrifice. He engaged to *live* for them and to *die* for them. In doing so, He took their nature into union with His divine nature, and became the subject of all their sinless infirmities, for (as we have seen) "it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren;" to be "in *all* points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Now we believe in these infirmities were included the fear of death. We have already intimated that we tremble at the thought of advancing anything derogatory to our glorious Christ; but we cannot think that we dishonour Him by stating that He in His own person, as the Head and Representative of His body the Church, was the subject of the fear of death.

Let us, by way of confirmation, turn to the Psalms, in most of which Christ was either the speaker or the spoken of or to. Look at the 22nd Psalm, about which there cannot be the slightest doubt that it is the language of Christ, inasmuch as some were the very words He expressed upon the cross: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of

joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and Thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me." Whence this but from the intense anguish of His soul? The wrath of God was poured out upon Him, as the Substitute of His redeemed; and, whilst enduring this, He combated all the horrors entailed not merely by natural but by eternal death. Again, look at the 40th Psalm: "Withhold not Thy tender mercies from me, O Lord: let Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth continually preserve me. For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me. Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me: O Lord, make haste to help me." What is this but earnest, importunate entreaty, under a sense of anguish and apprehension? Again, in the 69th Psalm, Christ is undoubtedly the speaker: "Save me, O God; for the waters are come in upon my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine ene-

mies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away. O God, Thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from Thee." Here Christ was speaking as the Substitute and Representative of His people. Their sin (margin, guiltiness) was laid upon Him. He was answerable, and therefore cried out under the weight and enormity of them. Is not the 14th verse expressive of fear? "Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters." Observe also the ardour of His entreaties: "Hear me, O Lord: for Thy lovingkindness is good: turn unto me according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies. And hide not Thy face from Thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily. Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it; deliver me because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before Thee. Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." Mark, moreover, the language of the 88th Psalm: "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and Thou hast afflicted me with all Thy waves. Selah. Thou hast put away mine acquaintance far from me; Thou hast made me an abomination unto them: I am shut up, and I cannot come forth. Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction: Lord, I have called daily upon Thee; I have stretched out my

hands unto Thee. Wilt Thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise Thee? Selah. Shall Thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or Thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark? and Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? But unto Thee have I cried, O Lord; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent Thee. Lord, why castest Thou off my soul? why hidest Thou Thy face from me? I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up: while I suffer Thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; Thy terrors have cut me off. They came round about me daily like water; they compassed me about together. Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." We quote one more passage from the Psalms—the 55th—in which the "fear of death" is most marked; and that this Psalm is likewise the language of Christ, there can be no question, for in it He distinctly refers to Judas, His betrayer: "My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me."

Thus far we have confined ourselves to what was spoken, prophetically, of or by Christ; but now, if we pass on to what was literally manifested by Him in the days of His flesh, we shall (if so be the Spirit shines upon His word) see how fully all these prophetic testimonies of Him were ratified and confirmed. In speaking on one occasion to His disciples, He exclaimed, "I have a baptism to be

baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." Who can conceive—much less what language can depict—all that was involved in that one word, straitened? Without question it embraces all that was anxious, agonizing, weighty, and important to the last degree; a something from which the mind recoiled, and the heart sank back as it were into itself, into the utmost possible gloominess, and dark, dismal foreboding and apprehension. Again, when Christ, addressing His Father, exclaimed, "Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee," what did He mean but that identical hour appointed from all eternity, and in which was as it were embodied and brought into one form all the anguish and terror and dismay involved in His suretyship undertakings? What did He mean by the Father's glorifying Him, but the impartation of help and the communication of strength which should enable Him to put the finishing stroke to the work upon which He had entered?

Is it not, moreover, testified of Him by the evangelist Matthew, in regard to His Gethsemane sufferings, that "He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy? Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. And He went a little farther, and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt. And He

cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done." Thus this going to and fro proved the intensity of His anguish, and that deep travail of soul under which He laboured. The testimony of the evangelist Mark is even more emphatic, for he declares that Jesus began to be "*sore amazed* and to be *very heavy*"; and saith unto them, *My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here and watch:*" as though He could not bear to be left alone, and yet could not rest, for we read, that "He went forward a little, and fell on the ground [such was the intensity of His anguish—such His agony, that He fell on the ground], and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from Him. And He said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee: take away this cup from me:" as much as to say, "Since Thou art almighty, and nothing is too hard for Thee, is there not some means which Thou canst devise for releasing me from this responsibility?" Then, as though re-assured of the utter impossibility of it, and remembering afresh His suretyship engagements, He adds, "Nevertheless not what I will [in my humanity], but what Thou wilt." The evangelist Luke testifies, further, "And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthen-

ing Him. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly : and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Once more, we hear Him exclaim, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Here was intensity of darkness, as Jehovah veiled His face, and as it were turned away from His own Son, whilst that Son was in the act of putting away for ever, by His own sufferings and death, that sin and transgression which Jehovah abhorred.

Finally, when Jesus had received the vinegar, "He said, *It is finished* : and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost."

Now, seeing that Christ thus served and thus suffered—seeing that He in His own person endured all that was due to His Church and people—seeing (as the Apostle Peter renders it) that "He bore our sins in His own body on the tree;" we ask, what *can* be left for the believer to do or to suffer? He felt and He feared for His redeemed, both representatively and mystically : representatively, as their Daysman, Substitute, and Surety ; mystically, as one in them and with them ; He the Head, they the members ; according to that gracious declaration by the prophet Isaiah, "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them : in His love and in His pity He redeemed them ; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old."

If such, then, be the case—and is it not so?—what ground is there for his or her fear or apprehension of death who is simply looking to, resting upon, con-

fiding in a precious Christ, as all their hope, all their salvation, all their desire? Expressly is it affirmed, in the language we have already quoted, that "through death (that is, by His own death) He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and (mark this) *deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*"

Oh, poor trembling one, when we think of what is recorded of this our glorious Surety—this our elder Brother—this our Friend that loveth at all times and that sticketh closer than a brother—this our Brother born for adversity; when we think that it is recorded of Him "Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared" (Heb. v. 7); how little cause have we for fear. Moreover, have we not both the divine declaration, first, that "we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin?" (Heb. iv. 15); and, secondly, the direction, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need?" (Heb. iv. 16).

Was it not upon these grounds that the Apostle Paul exclaimed, in the 15th of the 1st of Corinthians, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus

Christ?" And we may add, as he did, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Oh, that the Lord the Spirit may thus graciously direct the heart and eye of the reader simply and exclusively to Christ, as having served and suffered—not for Himself (for He needed not for Himself either to serve or to suffer)—but for him. He undertook—He entered upon—He pursued—He accomplished, for and on the behalf of every poor sensible sinner that has been accepted of God, that which at Calvary discharged Him from all the inconceivably weighty responsibilities of His suretyship engagements. His rising again confirmed His full rendering to divine justice all the honour and the homage due thereunto. He has ascended to heaven, and returned a mighty and triumphant Conqueror over sin, death, hell, and the grave.

Since, then, "He became sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him;" and since He "died the just for the unjust that He might bring such sinners as we are to God;" what is there left for us each to do or to fear? He exclaimed, "It is finished!" may we not triumph in the fact? May we not point to Moses with his law, and say, "My Surety has paid my debts?" May we not gaze at death with its feigned sting, and say, "There's none, for my Substitute received it into His very heart?" May we not

answer Satan with, "Thou art a chained foe. My Jesus died for me; and because He died, I live eternally. Sinner I was—sinner I am—sinner I shall be to the latest moment of my earthly being; but He by the shedding of His heart's blood, atoned for my transgression, and cancelled—and that for ever—my sins past, present, and to come? May I not look into the dark and dismal grave, and say, "My Lord, my Saviour, my Friend, my Husband, my eternal All and in All, has gone down into thy dark caverns before me; and

"Why should they tremble to convey
Our bodies to the tomb?
There the dear flesh of Jesus lay,
And left a long perfume?"

Oh, that these remarks, growing out of the facts that Sarah died, and that Abraham exclaimed, "Give me a possession of a burying-place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight," may prove to be a sweet, a salutary, a consolatory lesson from this Bible life to many an anxious and death-fearing reader. May such an one be taught by grace divine to sing—

"Christ is my light and treasure!
In death He is my life!
Through Him I leave with pleasure
This world of sin and strife.

"Through Christ my soul is ready,
His coming I desire:
Our union shall be steady,
When worlds depart on fire.

“ World, sin, and all temptation
Are conquered by His blood;
His death sealed my salvation
With my forgiving Lord!

“ When heart and flesh are failing,
And speech is from me fled,
Through faith in Christ prevailing,
On death itself I'll tread.

“ At nature's expiration,
By grace triumphant led,
With glory's expectation,
On Christ I lean my head.

“ From Christ death cannot sever,
He took away its sting;
With Christ I'm one for ever,
And death's destruction sing.”

CHAPTER XX.

THE PATRIARCH'S ADVANCED AGE—HIS CONCERN ABOUT HIS SON'S FUTURE—COMMISSIONS HIS SERVANT IN REGARD TO SEEKING HIM A WIFE—THE SERVANT'S SCRUPLES—THE PATRIARCH'S CONFIDENCE IN GOD—PREPARATION FOR THE JOURNEY ABOUT TO BE UNDERTAKEN—THE SERVANT'S SIMPLICITY AND DEVOTEDNESS—NOT AS YET KNOWING GOD AS HIS GOD, BUT NEVERTHELESS SEEKING GUIDANCE AND BLESSING OF HIM—HIS MARVELLOUS APPEAL AT THE THRONE OF GRACE—THE TRIUMPH OF FAITH IN THE STRIKING WORKING OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE WITH RESPECT TO REBEKAH—ENCOURAGEMENT TO WAIT UPON GOD UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.

WE have brought before us in the next chapter an incident in connexion with the patriarch's life, of a totally different character to any we have been considering; but, at the same time, one full of most important, practical teaching. It is recorded, that "Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things." How honourable and how cheering a testimony was this. What more consolatory than the contemplation of the fulfilment of Jehovah's own words: "Even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isa. xlv. 4). We

read, moreover, that "the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness" (Prov. xvi. 31).

But there was one matter that would appear to press heavily upon the patriarch's heart. It was in regard to the marriage of his son Isaac. Hence he said unto his confidential servant that "ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh: and I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell: but thou shalt go into my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac."

The servant feels at once the delicacy and the responsibility of his commission; and, regarding it in a merely human point of view, such an expedient would appear hazardous in the extreme. For one man to choose a wife for another, would seem above all things to be both absurd and unnatural. Hence Abraham's servant said unto his master, "Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest? And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again."

Now, from the annexed answer it will appear to every spiritual mind, that Abraham was again brought under the sweet exercise of faith. Without doubt, the subject he was now introducing to his servant, was one that had occupied him long and

anxiously at the throne of grace. Here was no shyness—here no keeping back in a spiritual sense—but an immediate and urgent appeal and reference to the Lord. He enjoyed a holy confidence in Him. Hence the declaration of His conviction of what should be the issue of his mission: “The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father’s house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; He shall send His angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again.”

Here again we have a striking example of the operation of that faith for which Abraham was so remarkable. Its acting in the present instance is totally distinct from the way it operated under previous circumstances: it, nevertheless, proves in the sequel to have been equally under the direction of its great and glorious Author. Hence it is fraught with the richest teaching and encouragement.

After due preparation, and an ample array of presents, Abraham’s servant starts upon his singular and responsible mission. He was evidently a man of thought, and possessed of a large share of worldly prudence and foresight. But for this, it is not at all likely he would have been raised to the important position he occupied in the patriarch’s house. It is clear, however, that he did not trust implicitly in his own personal knowledge and experience. It is here

men so commonly make the most fatal mistakes : they rely upon their own judgment ; they calculate upon their own individual attainments, as based upon personal knowledge and experience. But, in this world of change, with its continual fluctuations and diversities, experience of this kind (however valuable in a certain sense it may be) is not to be relied on. Hence, how often do we see men of profound wisdom and extreme foresight, adopt a course which some of the most simple and inexperienced would avoid, and, in avoiding, would show a far greater amount of that wisdom of which perhaps, at the same time, they are notoriously deficient ? Now whence this, but from a feeling on their part of the danger of self-trust and mere creature dependence ? Such (if taught of God) are imbued with the conviction, that “ it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps ; ” that though the “ heart of man may devise his way, that yet the Lord alone can direct his steps.”

In the case of Abraham’s servant, we find that, after all the precautionary and preparatory measures he had adopted—and for which he was undoubtedly to be commended—he does not rely upon them ; but, in the most childlike simplicity and sincerity, appeals to God. He avails himself of that sacred privilege which is ever open to the child of God. He looks upward for counsel and direction ; and, in doing so, exercises a freedom and an importunity scarcely to be paralleled in the whole book of God.

“ At the time of the evening ”—sweet season is evening-tide for prayer and communion—at early

morn, or as the shades of evening gather round, the world, to a certain extent at least, seems to recede—to the spiritual mind there is in a goodly measure a throwing off its shackles and its entanglements, and a seeking communion with the Father of spirits and the God of all consolation—at the “time (then) of the evening,” the patriarch’s servant said, “O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and show kindness unto my master Abraham. Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.”

Now, whilst there is peculiar modesty characterizing this petition, there is, at the same time, much earnestness—yea, an importunity that would seem to savour of dictation to the Lord; for the man, as it were, specially points out a course for the Lord to walk in. He appears to direct as to who the object should be, and when and under what circumstances she should come.

We have said there was modesty in the petition. This, we conceive, is betrayed in the manner in which the man words his petition. He does not say, “O Lord *my* God,” but he says, “O Lord God of my master Abraham.” Hence, we believe it to be

highly probable that Abraham's servant was not at a point about his own state—that as yet he knew not his adoption—and, therefore, in a godly jealousy of himself, and with a holy fear of presuming, hesitated to call God *his* God. We love to see this timidity, where it appears to be rightly grounded, and where it is evident the individual is waiting for the Lord the Spirit's own divine assurance of personal adoption. Nothing short of this will satisfy a Spirit-quickenened soul. Such an one must have the assurance “from God's own mouth.” It is not sufficient that there should be this or that promise in the word. The all-important question is, “Is such a promise for *me*? Am *I* justified in calling it *mine*? Have *I* felt, by blessed and heartfelt experience, that ‘the kingdom of heaven is not in word only, but in power?’ Has the Gospel come to *me*, ‘not in word only, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power?’” We love these inquiries. We delight to see souls in this waiting, observant posture; for well we know that such shall neither wait nor watch in vain, seeing it is written: “And therefore will the Lord wait, that He may be gracious unto you; and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you; for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him” (Isa. xxx. 18).

Again, we have said that there was earnestness in Abraham's servant's prayer—yea, an importunity amounting almost to dictation. Now, from this we learn, that it is not always the strong in faith—the confident—and those who have no conflict with doubts

and fears, who are the most earnest and the most successful petitioners. Here is this man, not, as we have said, at a point about his own state, but at the same time pleading with the Lord in a most remarkable manner. Hence we see that there is no ground for setting up standards, as many do, with respect to knowledge or experience. It is "the lame take the prey." Many a poor hesitating, doubting, fearing soul has his wrestling times with the Lord, and is so heard and so indulged by the Lord, that, at the very time he fears lest he should presume, he has some of the richest and most conclusive manifestations as to the Lord's special interest and peculiar regard for him.

Another lesson is discernible from the prayer of Abraham's servant, and that is, the advisability of seeking to pray for others when, it may be, we have neither heart nor power to pray for ourselves. Now this man knew full well how intensely anxious his master was in regard to the matter about which he had commissioned him ; hence, regardless of himself, and of the care and responsibility to which he had been subjected, he pleads for his master and on account of the matter so singularly entrusted to him. Certain we are, that where, by grace, a similar course is adopted, special blessings follow the cultivation, at the throne of grace, of this unselfishness—the seeking to remember others ; to plead for others. To weep with those that weep, and to rejoice with those that rejoice, is not only a God-wrought principle, and therefore most acceptable to Him, but it leads, like-

wise, to a warming of the heart, and an inspiring of the soul to take courage therefrom, and to venture to ask for a blessing for one's-self.

And how many, moreover, upon these grounds have found it so peculiarly sacred thus to pray for their enemies. In spite of themselves, and of their own preconceived feelings and prejudices, how divinely sweet it is when thus again, in forgetfulness of self, we are enabled simply and sincerely to ask blessings on those who have sought to malign or injure us. To say the least, what peace—what a calm—what a holy serenity—is instrumentally engendered thereby, issuing, it is extremely probable, in enlarged views of the person and work of Christ, and leading to closer and more endearing fellowship with Him.

In proof that the course adopted by Abraham's servant was not displeasing to God, we find it recorded, "And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up. And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher. And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hastened, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels

also, until they have done drinking. And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels. And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not" (Gen. xxiv. 15—21).

Here, again, we have proof of the servant's meekness, and one of those many instances which are to be met with, how others can see the Lord working when those more immediately concerned are in doubt about the matter. Who, looking at all the circumstances, could for a moment question the whole leadings and dealings to be of the Lord? Yet there is this man, "wondering at her, holding his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not." Perhaps he had been contemplating his own unworthiness thus to be dealt with. It may be he was in measure astounded at the issue of his own words. He felt, as many do, that he had only half believed; that, like Job, under another aspect of things, he had uttered things he knew not—things too wonderful for him. He had been under the special influence of the Divine Spirit, and was scarcely conscious of the fact, and now, whilst that Spirit is answering, in His own most gracious way, the desires and the entreaties He Himself had so kindled, the partaker of these high and holy privileges stands amazed at the contemplation. The thing seems too good to be true. The condescension is too great. The mercy is too intense. The love too profound. The grace too glorious. Such, in common with Manoah and his wife,

having "looked on," whilst the angel of the everlasting covenant "did wonderously," are ready to say with Manoah, "We shall surely die, because we have seen the Lord." He at the time lacking the exercise of that simple faith which enabled his wife, the weaker vessel, but the stronger in faith, to exclaim, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands, neither would He have shewed us all these things, nor would as at this time have told us such things as these" (Judges xiii. 23).

Oh, what a lesson of encouragement does this whole subject bring before us, beloved reader! Why need we doubt—why hesitate about carrying this or that before the Lord, when furnished from His own word with such a simple statement of facts as that under consideration? How well may such a history prompt us to plead for that simple, precious measure of grace which shall enable us to give heed to His own most encouraging exhortation, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. iv. 6).

The history continues: "And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; and said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said unto him, I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah, which she bare unto

Nahor. She said, moreover, unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in" (Gen. xxiv. 22—25).

Then we read that, in thankfulness and adoring gratitude and wonder, "The man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren" (Gen. xxiv. 26, 27).

In pursuing the facts, the observant reader will be struck with the frankness and simplicity which characterise the whole proceedings. There is no contrivance—nought of that underhand expediency in which poor fallen nature is wont to deal. The whole is perfectly open and above board. The servant is greeted with a "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without?" And the servant, in turn, tells out, in the simplest, and frankest, and most candid way, the nature of his errand, and the manner in which his own heart and mind had been influenced. Such testimonies always carry their own weight with them. There is a certain dignity and power about the records of grace and the character of the Lord's dealings that carry conviction with them. Thus it was in the case before us. "Now," said the servant, "if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left. Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto

thee bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before thee, take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken " (Gen. xxiv. 49—51).

Furthermore, when it was proposed that Rebekah should tarry for a season, the man said unto them, "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master. And they said, We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go. And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men " (Gen. xxiv. 56—59).

Then, with regard to the reception of Rebekah upon the part of Isaac, we read that "Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel. For she had said unto the servant, What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done. And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death " (Gen. xxiv. 63—67).

Thus we see the all-sufficiency of grace, and that even with respect to matters in which so much of creature correspondence and adaptation of tempera-

ment and disposition is necessary, the Lord knows how to devise and to direct. He who *formed* man assuredly knows best how to *adapt* man. He, who at the beginning said, "It is not good that man should be alone, let us make a help meet for him," must of necessity know best who is the most fitting help meet. Hence the Lord's children have ever found, in making this most important of all earthly considerations a matter of simple earnest entreaty at the throne of grace, that He has magnified His word, and fulfilled His promise, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths."

CHAPTER XXI.

FAVOURITISM IN FAMILIES—ITS DANGER AND DESTRUCTIVENESS—
ISAAC'S WISH AND EFFORTS TO BLESS ESAU—HIS CRIMINALITY
IN THUS SEEKING TO FRUSTRATE THE REVEALED PURPOSE OF
JEHOVAH—REBEKAH'S SIN ALSO IN SEEKING TO ANTICIPATE
JEHOVAH'S DESIGNS BY HER OWN CARNAL POLICY—THE FRUITS
OF SOWING TO THE FLESH—JEHOVAH'S DESIGNS NOT TO BE
FRUSTRATED.

WE have now to pass on to a most eventful period in Isaac's life—one which, indeed, is fraught with the most wholesome instruction, and may well awaken the most sober and careful scrutiny in every believing heart.

Rebekah, after a season, became the mother of two sons, who, as it had been clearly foreshown of God before they were born, were of totally different dispositions, and designed of God for totally different ends. But in this (humanly speaking) consisted all the after-trouble of both Isaac and Rebekah, for it is said of them, that "Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob." Here was favouritism—the root of inconceivable evil wherever and whenever it is found in families, and against which no parents can be too watchful or prayerful. And surely one of the objects the Lord

had in view in dwelling at such length upon the history of the family of Isaac and Rebekah, was that the most wholesome and important lessons should be inculcated thereby.

It is recorded, in the opening of the 27th chapter, that "It came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him: My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; and make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die."

Now, that Isaac was essentially wrong—criminally wrong—in this his proceeding, there cannot be a doubt. First, he was seeking to gratify his natural taste, or favouritism; and, in doing so, he must have been aware that he was going in direct opposition to the plainly revealed mind and will of God. Can there be a question of Rebekah's having previously made known to her husband the result of her application at the throne of grace? She had gone to inquire of the Lord; and had not the Lord clearly revealed to her that she was to bring forth the heads of two nations, and that "the elder should serve the younger?" Is it at all likely that Rebekah would have kept her husband in the dark about such an all-important communication? True it is, that no portion of the Book of

God savours more of Divine sovereignty, or Jehovah's perfect right to do as He pleases, than this portion does ; but, as the Apostle says in after-days, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God ? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus ?" Again, in Isaac's requesting that Esau would "make him savoury meat, such as his soul loved," there was a further seeking, on his part, to gratify the flesh ; and this would not be approved of by God. The course of self-denial is the only safeguard. They that "are in the flesh," we are distinctly told, "cannot please God." That to which, as believers, we are called, is the "denying of self, taking up our cross daily, and following Christ," whose whole life was one of self-denial. Clear it was, that He sought not to do His own will—that is His own will as man—but the will of Him that sent Him."

But, as Isaac's course was unjustifiable, so also was that of Rebekah. True it was, that, according to appearance, Esau was about to obtain the blessing ; and she, perhaps, in a measure of regard for God's declared will, as well as in furtherance of her own predilection for Jacob, sought to frustrate it ; but the means she took for the accomplishment of her object were altogether without warrant. Her course stands in singular contrast with that of Abraham's servant, which we have just been contemplating. With the particulars of that course none were more familiar than was Rebekah, yet she egregiously failed in following the noble example that

servant had set her. Instead of adopting his frankness and honesty, she lent herself, most unworthily, to a series of crafty, specious designs, encouraging her son therein, and prompting him to a course of deception and lying which, but for God's overruling hand, might, as Jacob had foreshown, have "brought a curse upon him, and not a blessing."

There was no need whatever of Rebekah's adopting such expedients. Knowing, as she did, what was Jehovah's declared will, it was for her to have waited in faith and patience for the development of that will. She might have been at a loss to know how, under the circumstances, His purposes could be accomplished, seeing, according to appearances, that they were about immediately to be frustrated; but she was thus setting up her poor, puny judgment, and exercising her poor, short-sighted reason, in opposition to the wisdom and the power of Him who "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will." "He that believeth shall not make haste," is the divine declaration. Jehovah is never at a loss for means for the execution of His own divine plans. Never will He suffer His purposes to be defeated, or the designs of His eternal mind to be frustrated. "I will work," is His language, "and none shall let," or hinder. "My counsel," He says, "shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

The province of faith is, then, as we have heretofore stated, "to stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord." This Rebekah failed to do. She adopted her own course. She followed the dictates of her

own carnal heart, and, by so doing, laid the foundation for an intensity of after-grief.

The 27th chapter of Genesis cannot, we admit, be read without much emotion. But, whilst reading, we must beware lest we should be brought under the influence of the natural rather than the spiritual. We must seek steadily to keep in view God's revealed mind. We must not overlook the parental partiality to which we have already alluded. We must not forget that Esau had positively sold away the privileges of the first-born, and had thus, in "despising his birthright," contemned Christ, the first-born and only-begotten of the Father. Esau was a Christ despiser. There cannot be a doubt that he had heard much about Him who was to be the Child born, and the Son given, in Isaac his father's line. Having *sold* his birthright, it was unjust of him to seek the blessing attached to the first-born. If Jacob were a *deceiver*, he was a *de-frauder*.

Again we see in their history, how God will have His own way, in spite of man. Isaac sought to bless Esau, but unwittingly he blessed Jacob. And the very way in which he blessed, would seem to bespeak an impression upon his mind, that, in wishing to bless Esau, he was running counter to the mind of God. It was as though conscience were intimating that he was seeking to further his own fancy, rather than concurring with the good pleasure of Jehovah. How remarkable was the confirmation of the testimony, that "the elder should serve the younger," in that "Isaac an-

swered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?"

Moreover, however the natural mind may seem to sympathise with Esau—and, *as a man*, we are disposed to think, he was the better of the two, for Jacob's *natural* character we cannot admire—yet we must not overlook what is recorded of him: "And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob." Thus Cain the murderer's spirit was afresh manifested in Esau.

But what was the natural consequence of Isaac's flesh-pleasing efforts, and Rebekah's human policy, but the virtual loss of both their sons? and thus poor human nature defeats itself. We read, that "These words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; and tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away; until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?"

Reader, may we, from the foregoing, learn afresh the lesson of standing in dread of ourselves. We

have not nearly so much reason to dread *Satan* as to fear *ourselves*. *Satan*, with all his vigilance and power, is, after all, only an *outward* foe; but *self*, alas! is an ever-present, *inward* enemy. One, and One only, could say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me;" whereas in us he has everything to suit his purpose, and adapted to his temptations. Our hearts are like tinder, upon which it is only for *Satan* to drop the sparks of temptation, and instantly we are "set on fire of hell;" and should, unquestionably, be speedily consumed, but for the stronger than *Satan* who checks the fire, and restrains the destructive force of the temptation.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SOVEREIGNTY AND THE RICHES OF DIVINE GRACE—JACOB'S DEPARTURE FROM HOME—THE LORD'S MEETING WITH HIM, AND GRACIOUS COVENANT PROMISES CONCERNING HIM — BETHEL-BLESSINGS—APPEAL TO THE READER—THE LORD'S EXTREME TENDERNESS AND COMPASSION.

IN our last chapter we were called to contemplate the sovereignty of divine power; in the present we may contemplate, with even increased, amazement the sovereignty and the riches of divine grace.

Jacob leaves his father's house, and he leaves it, too, under the most painful of circumstances: he has to flee the wrathful indignation of his brother Esau. The leaving the parental roof at any time is among the most painful ordeals to which our poor minds are called, but the leaving it under such circumstances as those in which Jacob was called upon to separate himself from his kindred and connexions, was additionally distressing.

Having walked some forty miles, or thereabouts, we read, that, at length, "he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and

put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep."

Believing, as we do, that, up to this time, Jacob was personally ignorant of God as the God of salvation, his journeying that day, and under those circumstances, must have been extremely desolate. We cannot conceive of anything more so. Travelling on foot, as he must have done, over a wild, bleak, barren waste—in all probability meeting not a human soul—left, too, to the cogitations of his own mind—how exceedingly desolate must have been his condition! And then, when from very weariness, and because night had already set in, he laid himself down to sleep, with nought but the vast canopy of heaven for his curtain, and the straggling stones round about the plain where he halted collected and set for his pillows; no devoted mother to caress, no fond father to bid adieu to for the night; all dark and drear. Oh! what is man, in this respect, without his fellow-man? How unendurable is solitude, and that portentous gloom which dreariness and desolation enkindle! Man, under such circumstances, is startled by his own shadow, and is alarmed by the dropping of a leaf. If ever he needs the assurance that that "hedge is about him" of which Satan spoke to God concerning Job, it is then.

And such was to be manifested in regard to Jacob. He was a wanderer, and, as we have said, we believe, had hitherto been personally ignorant of the God of Abraham and of the God of Isaac; but now, in spite of all that he was and all that he had done, that God,

in the exercise of the riches of His free and sovereign grace, was about to reveal Himself: for we read, that Jacob “dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”

What could have been more merciful? what more gracious? and, withal, what more adapted to Jacob's requirements? With nothing whatever to commend him—with the sin of craft and lying fresh upon his conscience (if indeed that conscience had as yet been rendered becomingly susceptible of right and wrong)—with original and actual sin upon him—and without any evidence whatever of his having even in the most formal way sought the Lord, we find that self-same Lord revealing Himself to him in the most merciful, tender, and gracious way. Well might Jacob exclaim, as he awoke out of his sleep—doubtless the most refreshing, though seemingly the most exposed sleep he had ever taken—“Surely the Lord is in this

place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee."

Reader, do you know anything of the Lord's meeting you in the self-same merciful and gracious way? You were immersed in the world, it may be, or

"Sunk in carnal, vain delights,"

following the giddy multitude to do evil, saying, "To-morrow shall be as to-day, and much more abundant;" and God, of His great mercy, was pleased to arrest you in your downward progress—to stop you in your mad career. And He did so, not with upbraiding, not with censure, not by as it were shaking you over hell, as in some cases He has done; but in the utmost pitifulness, and tenderness, and compassion. Jacob was not in a position at this time

to be thus dealt with. Had such scenes come upon him now as did come upon him afterwards, when he was better enabled to bear them, oh, how pitiful would have been his condition ! He could not have borne terrors and dismay now. This would have been to have overwhelmed and crushed. But he is dealt with in mercy—in the utmost tenderness and forbearance—in sweet kindness and compassion ; so gently, so soothingly, so persuasively. It was such an appeal to the heart, and so sweetly coupled with a promise and a pledge—so large, so full, so gracious.

Reader, do you know anything of these dealings ?

CHAPTER XXIII.

JEHOVAH TRUE TO HIS WORD — HIS PROVIDENCE CONFIRMING HIS PROMISE—MEASURE FOR MEASURE, OR THE FRUITS OF SOWING TO THE FLESH — JACOB'S LOVE FOR RACHEL, AND THE CONSEQUENT SEEMING SHORTNESS OF HIS SERVITUDE — WHOLESOME SUGGESTION TO THE SERVANTS OF JESUS—A WANT OF STRAIGHT-FORWARDNESS IN JACOB — JEHOVAH MANIFESTIVELY TAKING MATTERS INTO HIS OWN HAND FOR THE PATRIARCH'S PRESERVATION.

IN the next chapter we see how the Lord began graciously to open out, in rich and blessed fulfilment, His promises respecting Jacob. God's providence invariably confirms God's word. As Jehovah led Abraham's servant in the important matter of seeking a wife for Isaac, so Jehovah led Jacob towards one who in due time was to become his wife also. But the circumstances in relation thereto strikingly confirm the word which says: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting;" and again, "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you again." Jacob

had deceived Isaac, and, in time, Laban deceives him. He served as he thought for Rachel, but he is put off with Leah. He afterwards testifies to his wives: "Ye know that with all my power I have served your father: and your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times." Again, with respect to Joseph's coat of many colours, Jacob was subsequently deceived by his sons.

These facts may well impress with the lesson of ever seeking to deal with our fellow-men as in the sight of Him who "searcheth the heart and trieth the reins of the children of men." Men we may deceive—and this only for a time; God never! And remarkable are the means which the Lord employs for bringing to the light the craftiness and the subtlety of the human heart. Oftentimes it is seen that the longer a matter in which deception has been practised, lies concealed, the more remarkably, and to the greater dismay and confusion of the deceiver, is the thing brought to light.

There is one striking fact spoken of in regard to Jacob's service for Rachel. It is said, that "Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and *they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.*" When we pass from the less to the greater, and when we contrast human with spiritual love, how well may the servants of Jesus take shame and reproach to themselves with respect to their service for Him! Alas! how cold is their love! And, instead of regarding with comparative indifference the little trials and afflictions they are called to endure for His sake,

how much do they make of those trials, and how little do they regard the fact, that these very trials —“ this light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Oh, if that love were but proportionably in exercise, then would the servants of the Lord realise more of that which Jacob realised, so that even the whole time-state would seem short indeed, for the love they had to the most loving and gracious Friend, and in the prospect of the marriage-union being so speedily consummated.

Oh, to learn this lesson from the life of Jacob, and to reckon months and years only by far too short whilst seeking, in our day and generation, to do some little for Him who has done so much for us! Very sure we are, that, if our minds were more occupied with the thought of the magnitude of Christ's work on our behalf, and the extreme brevity of the time we are permitted to labour for Him, we should be far less disposed to dwell upon our discomforts, vexations, or opponents.

There is another important lesson to be gleaned from the earlier history of Jacob, and that with regard to his servitude: it is that which may be gathered from the remark of Laban to Jacob. “And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry; for *I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake.*”

Now, this is a truth which has ever been verified with respect to the family of God. He not only blesses them, but He blesses *others* for *their* sake.

Where a child of God goes, a blessing attends him ; and, when removed, a blank is a certain consequence. How many a child of God is as salt in a family, and, on account of that salt, the family is preserved. How does it behove masters and mistresses, for this reason, highly to value, when they can get them, God-fearing servants ; and what more consolatory to a godly master or mistress, than to know that they are daily remembered before the Lord by those engaged in their service ?

With regard to the means which Jacob adopted, in order to multiply his flocks, we cannot but think it savours of that natural selfishness which we conceive to have been prominent in Jacob's character. Both with respect to this and the way in which he fled from Laban, there is betrayed a lack of that perfect frankness and openness which are so commendable. It is not because Jacob had what men would term a great amount of *depth*, or *selfish thoughtfulness* and *consideration*, and that God wrought for him and blessed him, in spite of it, that therefore this kind of thing is commendable or justifiable. We contend that the whole history of Jacob is so rife with teaching upon this head, as to suggest the most important reflections for our consideration, caution, and admonition.

True it is, that " the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred, and I will be with thee." True it is, that Jacob exclaims, " the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob : and I said, Here am I. And he said, Lift

up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grised : for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me : now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred ” (Gen. xxxi. 11—13) ; but was it necessary, on these grounds, that he should go away as he did—that he should “ flee with all that he had ? ” Could not the same God, who commanded him to go, have so wrought upon Laban’s mind as to make him willing to permit him to go ? Was not such subsequently the case ; for do we not read, that “ God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad ? ” (Gen. xxxi. 24.) The fact of the Lord’s overruling these circumstances, and of His so sovereignly and graciously taking matters into His own hand, for the defence and protection of Jacob, is no extenuation of his conduct. These things—we insist upon it—are written for our admonition, as well as for our encouragement. We once heard an individual justify a course of business-craft and shop-deception, upon the ground of what Jacob did in order to enrich himself at the expense of Laban.

Now, that Jacob might have pursued a different course with respect to his departure from Laban is clear from what subsequently passed between them. “ Then Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount : and Laban with his

brethren pitched in the mount of Gilead. And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword? Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp? and hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters; thou hast now done foolishly in so doing. It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. And now, though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods? And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me" (Gen. xxxi. 25—31).

Here was Jacob's FEAR again; and where there is a want of that perfect honesty and straightforwardness, *fear* will be a necessary consequence.

Whilst we would just remark, that, in addition to the instances of deception upon Jacob, to which we previously alluded, Rachel herself practised a piece of deception upon him, we would not overlook the patriarch's most powerful appeal to Laban. There is a striking sublimity, and the most touching pathos, in this his appeal. "And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my

sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both. This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether it was stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was; in the day the drougt consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction, and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight" (Gen. xxxi. 36—42).

CHAPTER XXIV.

MORE TROUBLES FOR JACOB — THIS A WORLD OF CARE AND ANXIETY — MERELY A CHANGE OF TROUBLES WHILST ON PILGRIMAGE, AND TRIAL, AS SUCH, INDISPENSABLE — ESAU COMING FORTH TO MEET JACOB WITH FOUR HUNDRED MEN — JACOB'S ANGUISH — HIS POLICY — HIS PRAYER — HIS PREVAILING WITH THE ANGEL OF THE EVERLASTING COVENANT — "THE LAMB TAKE THE PREY" — ENCOURAGEMENT.

WE find Jacob again, in the next chapter, in the very depths of anguish. How truly was illustrated, in this patriarch's case, the words of the immortal Bunyan :—

"The Christian man is never long at ease ;
When one fright's gone, another doth him seize."

Jacob was anxious for a change. He was weary of his service with Laban. He sought, in all probability, more ease—additional comfort. Apart from the consideration, that God told him to "return to the land of his father, and his kindred," it was a dangerous expedient. When the Lord draws us out, or drives us out, from one scene of action for another, it is one thing ; the seeking it of our own fleshly mind and will, is another. But, presuming

that the path of duty is made clear, and that we have an undoubted conviction that it is the Lord who is leading us hither and thither, it will be the extreme of folly to suppose that that path into which the Lord is about to conduct us is exempt from trial. Assuredly we shall find it to be only an exchange of trials—a variation of perplexity and discomfort and sorrow—all the way of the wilderness. And those of us who know most of our own hearts, are sensible that such trials and such sorrows are absolutely indispensable. We cannot do without them. We must, whilst on pilgrimage, have that which will stir us up and arouse us yet more and more to a conviction, that “this is not our rest—it is polluted.” Instead, therefore, of seeking to shun the cross, or to shift it, it behoves us the rather to seek that the Lord should reconcile us thereto, by giving us to trace His hand in the appointment, and by seeking that the purpose for which it was laid upon us should be answered.

After Laban had left Jacob, and, in connexion with their separation, had set up their *Mizpah*, saying so touchingly, “The Lord watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another,” the patriarch had not proceeded far on his way before “messengers returned to him, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him.” As a natural consequence, we read that “then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed.”

Hence it is clear, that, however bright the mani-

festation, or however undoubted the intimation of the Lord's mind with respect to the pursuit of any particular course, it does not exempt us from circumstances which may becloud the path, and, as far as appearances are concerned, render our position a questionable one. Moreover, as in Jacob's case, we often see that the very special manifestation is only the immediate prelude to some extreme trial. It is upon these grounds that some of the Lord's children are less anxious for those bright and joyous manifestations, knowing the trial of faith to which they so commonly lead. They, on the contrary, are more desirous of the sober, settled, established peace, than the rapture and the joy, attendant upon which is frequently the most painful reaction.

Jacob, as heretofore, resorts again to his own wisdom; but, oh, of what little avail would it have been had not *the Lord* been his Defender and Keeper! He "divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; and said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape."

His last resource was best. He betakes himself to prayer. "And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan:

and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude."

Here was, first, the language of *appeal*, and that upon the twofold ground of Jehovah's character and covenant; next, there was the language of *acknowledgment*, and this, too, upon a twofold ground—his own utter unworthiness, and what the Lord had done for him; then there was *application*—and this upon the ground of his extreme peril, and the pledge the Lord had given him in regard to the increase of his seed.

Again he resorts to the exercise of his own fleshly wisdom: "I will appease him," he says, "with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me." Hence he prepares a goodly present for Esau. Again he betakes himself to prayer: and here was at once his wisest policy and his best security. "And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two womenservants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and he sent over that he had. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day."

Observe, reader, that it was the night-season—

and thus it is commonly with the deep exercises of the mind: ardent wrestling, during the night-time of the soul, in its contact with the darkness that may be felt; yea, it may be the "horror of great darkness," which Abraham encountered. Moreover, Jacob must be "left alone," like his Master in after-day. There can be no intrusion. It must be a single-hand combat—hand to hand, heart to heart. Then, after the night-season, the gloominess, and darkness, the felt danger and seeming desertion; the ardent, intense wrestling connected therewith, and springing therefrom; then, at length, comes "the breaking of the day;" and, with the first break of day, the veriest glimmer of light, comes the voice. Yea, does not that very voice bring the dawn? It was all silence before; and what so painful as this? No word—no reply—no apparent giving heed! Dense darkness and profound silence; yea, so profound as to lead to the most painful conjecture that it is an indication of no interest, no favour; but the contrary—indignation, and perhaps wrath and destruction. Oh, how agonizing all this! What a relief, then, if the voice is but heard; but, more especially, if in the language of inquiry or request. But, before that voice, observe what was most significant in Jacob's case: "And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him."

The Almighty Wrestler (for who was this "man" that wrestled with Jacob but the man Christ Jesus,

who, in that early day, assumed manhood, and then gave practical intimation of His divine intention, in the fulness of time, to become man, and, for a season, to tabernacle in our flesh?)—but this Almighty Wrestler, purposing to be overcome of the worm Jacob, would first put his thigh out of joint, in order that thereafter Jacob should not take the credit of the conquest to himself. He was to overcome, but not by himself, or of his own strength; for what could a limping Jacob do with the mighty Conqueror, the omnipotent Jehovah Jesus? Thus, reader, are all the battles upon the field of grace fought and won; won by the Lord's own weapons; won by the Lord's own power, put forth in the hearts and hands of His own chosen warriors. "The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong." "The lame take the prey."

Oh, how wonderful that such a poor timid one as the patriarch, in and of himself, was, should be so emboldened, as to reply to the request, "Let me go, for the day breaketh," "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me."

What encouragement is this for poor sinners to betake themselves to the same all-gracious and all-sufficient source, for help in time of trouble. "And He said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And He said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked Him, and said, Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name. And He said, Wherefore is it

that thou dost ask after my name? And He blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh."

CHAPTER XXV.

ESAU'S REVENGEFUL INTENTIONS UNQUESTIONABLY OVERRULED OF
GOD—JACOB'S ADMIRATION OF JEHOVAH'S HANDIWORK—HIS
MARVELLOUS WISDOM, BOUNDLESS LOVE, AND DIVINE CONDE-
SCENSION—APPEAL TO THE LORD—A PLEA THAT HE WOULD, IN
THESE LATTER AND TRUTH-DESPISING DAYS, MAGNIFY HIMSELF
AND HIS OWN GLORIOUS TRUTH.

THAT Esau had set out with his four hundred men, bent on having his revenge upon Jacob, there can be no doubt; and what, under the circumstances, could the patriarch have done, if so be the Lord had not fought for him? He, according to His own previous and most gracious assurance, went before him, and was his rereward. But for this, all Jacob's plans and devices would have been without avail. In God, and God alone, was his security. And how wonderfully does Jehovah ratify His word, "When a man's ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him!" Now, notwithstanding the previous wrathful intentions of Esau, because the Lord's rich covenant favour alighted upon Jacob, and because God would show that all hearts are in His hand, and all circumstances under His divine control, He so works upon the mind of Esau—

between whom and Himself there was no love, for distinctly is it testified, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated"—that Esau actually "*ran* to meet Jacob, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept." And then, when Esau inquired as to the drove which he had met, and was informed, that "it was to find grace in his sight," he replied, "I have enough, *my brother*; keep that thou hast unto thyself." Well might Jacob say, in reply: "Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: *for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me.*"

Thus it is seen, in the overruling and well-ordering hand of God, how wonderfully He directs, and regulates, and controls all persons, circumstances, and events; so that sometimes in the most hostile characters, as well as in the most unpromising and seemingly unpropitious of matters, the whole turns out to the furtherance of God's glory and His dear children's present and eternal advantage.

Oh, what encouragement is there for the Lord's poor and needy ones! O Lord, do enable us more and more simply and entirely to look to Thee; to cast all our care upon Thee; to rely on Thee. Lead us more and more unto the sweetness and the blessedness of bringing our hard causes unto Thee, knowing that Thou hast said that Thou wilt hear them. What can we do without Thee? To whom can we look but unto Thyself? Whither shall we flee but unto Thine own gracious arms? O Lord, Lord, help, help;

help Thou us with a little help. Turn not a deaf ear to our cry. Vouchsafe, we implore Thee, to give heed. As Thou didst appear for Thy worm Jacob of old, so do Thou appear for us. Be mindful of Thy promise. Do as Thou hast said. Make bare Thine Almighty arm, and come forth afresh in delivering acts, so that revenues of praise and adoration may redound unto Thy great and glorious name. O Lord, Lord, we would fain be wrestling Jacobs, until Thou dost Thyself make us prevailing Israels. We want Thee to speak to us even as Thou didst unto him. We would have Thee indulge us as Thou didst him, with a "Let me go, for the day breaketh," on purpose that we may reply to Thee as he did, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." O Lord, deign to hear, condescend to bless. Dost Thou ask our name? Ah, full well Thou knowest who we are, what we are, and what we want,—the healing word, Lord; the "Go in peace;" the "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." This, Lord, is what we want. This is what we crave. Oh, turn not away Thy lovely face. Deny us not. Give heed, we pray Thee, to our supplication. Let it evermore be said of Thee, in regard to Thy poor and needy suppliant, "*and He blessed him there.*" Let it stand good in our day, even as it did in the patriarch's day. Let it in these last days, amid all the scoffs, and scruples, and scepticism of Thine enemies,—let it, we pray Thee, anew be declared, "*and He blessed him there.*" There, in the trial-spot—there, in the temptation-spot—there, in the deep, deep trouble-spot—there,

where heart and flesh so verily fail. O Lord, Lord, Thou knowest Thy servant, and Thou knowest the peculiar anxiety—yea, anguish—with which he pens these lines before Thee. Oh, let it be seen, in time to come, that Thou didst in very deed give heed; that Thou hast, once again, proved to be the self-same prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God that Thou wast in Jacob's day. Let Thy interposing hand be so seen; let Thy glorious voice be so heard; let Thy marvellous mercy, grace, and goodness^{be} afresh so condescendingly and graciously vouchsafed, that Thy poor trembling servant may realize in very deed that Thou didst "bless him there;" and that, in the ecstasy of his grateful and enraptured soul, he may exclaim, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's. The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward

♦ them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."

O Lord, do Thou hear these our cries, for Christ the Redeemer's sake. Amen, and Amen.

CHAPTER XXVI.

EACH DAY HAS ITS ATTENDANT TRIALS — TROUBLE FOR MOST PART THE NATURAL CONSEQUENCE OF OUR WEAKNESS AND POLLY — LITTLE COMPARATIVELY GAINED BY OBSERVATION MERELY — GOD'S PEOPLE MUST LEARN FOR THEMSELVES : HENCE THE THORN OR THE FURNACE—JACOB AND HIS FAVOURITISM—JOSEPH AND HIS DREAMS—HIS BRETHREN'S HOSTILITY—JOSEPH'S BANISHMENT—JEHOVAH'S UNSEEN YET WELL-WORKING PURPOSES—JACOB'S ANGUISH.

THE remark stands good in regard to Jacob, which was made in a previous chapter, as to the repetition of trial and the renewal of affliction. The patriarch was to know but little of the plains of ease. His journey throughout the wilderness was to be rough and stormy. He was to know full well, in his own experiences, what has since been expressed by one of our hymn writers :—

“ Finds every day new straits attend,
And wonders where the scene will end.”

After the patriarch had dwelt for a season in the land of Canaan, new troubles presented themselves ; and no doubt it was in Jacob's case, as it is in the experience of most of the Lord's family,—his trials arose from a source the least expected. Yet there

was again poor Jacob's own weakness and folly intermixed with the trial; and where, we would again ask, is this not the case? Who of us have not, at least in measure and degree, ourselves to thank for those trials and afflictions which so commonly come in a way of fatherly rebuke and loving chastisement? Does not our creature-idolatry, our worldliness, or our wantonness, appeal to the heart, and, in terms too plain to be misunderstood, and in language too loud and too pointed to escape our attention, say, "Hast thou not procured these things unto thyself?" "Verily, Lord," conscience answers; and the consciousness of this does, in measure, under His seasonable and wonder-working hand, reconcile to the cross, the trial, the sorrow.

Isaac had a favourite, and Jacob could but know it, too. Rebekah had a favourite, and Jacob could but be aware of this also. One would have supposed that the knowledge of the bitter trials which arose out of this very favouritism would have had a salutary influence upon the mind of Jacob; but, no, it is comparatively little he learnt, or others learn, by mere *observation*. He had to learn—and but few, if any, of the Lord's children, but what have to learn—by direct, personal, positive teaching. They must see, hear, know, feel *for themselves*. It is the teaching of the heart—the learning by line upon line, line upon line—here a little and there a little, in a way of heartfelt experience. And sure we are that, sooner or later, all the Lord's children are brought to say with the Psalmist, "I know, O Lord, that Thy judg-

ments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." The sense of their own sin and folly humbles them at the footstool of mercy, and reconciles them to the fatherly chastisement which is inflicted upon them. They feel the truth of Dr. Watts's words—

"The pity of the Lord
To those who fear His name,
Is such as tender parents feel,
He knows our feeble frame.

"He will not always chide,
And, when His strokes are felt,
His strokes are fewer than our crimes,
And lighter than our guilt."

Ah, reader, if you know anything of your own heart, and of your own base ingratitude, and wanderings, and backslidings, are you not bound to acknowledge the truth of the above lines? Do you not see increased cause for humbling yourself in the very dust before God, and exclaiming, in the language of the prophet Daniel, "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgments: neither have we hearkened unto Thy servants the prophets, which spake in Thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land? O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries

whither Thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against Thee. O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against Thee" (Dan. ix. 5—8). But, oh, what a mercy to be able to add to this confession this acknowledgement also : "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him." How sweet, moreover, in the words of the same prophet, to add, "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken, and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my God;" and then giving as a reason why he should be heard, "*for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name.*"

In the opening of the 37th chapter of Genesis, we read : "Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age : and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him." We then find that Joseph dreamed a dream ; and, in consequence of his telling the dream to his brethren, "they hated him yet the more." This first dream was followed by another, the which he likewise tells to his brethren. It would seem remarkable that he should do so, conscious as he must have been of their antipathy to him. But in this, when viewed in its connexion, is more clearly to be traced the hand of God. We can quite understand, how Joseph would, *afterwards*, reproach himself for his folly, in having told his dreams to his

brethren. He would *then* say, that their increased hostility, considering the character of his dreams, was only a natural consequence; and, upon these grounds, it was more than likely he would reproach himself for his want of judgment and foresight. But such would have been useless regrets, and, so to speak, only a loss of time and a waste of energy. This remark, reader, will apply to ourselves, in regard to our lamentations over what *we* may conceive to have been mistaken steps. Rather, if we have ground for concluding that we have erred, either by word or work, be it ours to seek to humble ourselves before the Lord; to acknowledge our folly; and to entreat the Lord so to order and overrule matters, as to cause those very sayings or doings to minister to His glory and to our edification and present and eternal advantage. That it is in the Lord's power so to do is evident: first, from His own gracious testimony, "We know that *all* things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose;" and, secondly, from plain matter of fact. Among these facts and illustrations of the truth of this sentiment, is the chequered, but at the same time most cheering, history of Joseph.

In unison with the regrets of Joseph, to which we have just alluded, we can easily conceive that reproaches of a similar kind took possession of the mind of the patriarch himself, when he witnessed the issue of his having sent Joseph to see how his brethren fared, whilst tending their flocks at a dis-

tance. There cannot be a doubt of Jacob's being aware of the enmity of Joseph's brethren against their brother; it would seem, therefore, the more remarkable, that, in the face of this knowledge, he should have hazarded his safety by sending him on such a mission. This surprise is increased, when what is recorded is taken into consideration: that whilst Joseph's brethren "hated him yet the more for his dreams, and his words," "and his father rebuked him," yet, nevertheless, he "observed the saying." He deemed the dreams remarkable; he thought that they savoured of something supernatural; and, as with Mary, in after-day, who "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart," so the patriarch, in spite of his own pride of heart, at the idea of being placed in a subordinate position in respect to his own child, "observed the saying"—treasured it up in his own mind, as being worthy of watchfulness and consideration. Strange, then, we say, humanly speaking, that, in the face of these impressions, he should have imperilled Joseph's life and security by sending him—and that solitarily and alone—in quest of his brethren.

This again, when viewed in its important bearings upon after circumstances, suggests the recognition of the hand of God in the ordering and directing all things, and urges upon us the necessity of seeking to walk by *faith*, rather than by *sight*. We know indeed but "parts of His ways." He emphatically, through all their wilderness career, "brings the blind by a way that they know not, and leads them in

paths that they have not known." And, as we have already intimated, it is a waste of time and energy to be indulging in useless regrets; rather with regard to our chequered pathway, and all the varied and, it may be, disheartening details connected therewith, to have the heart and eye directed to Him, who, in the infinitude of His wisdom, may (as in myriads of cases He has done) make those apparently mistaken steps of ours minister essentially and indispensably to the furtherance of His glory, and the present and eternal welfare of our immortal souls: so that, in their relation to after developments, our waywardness—aye, and our wilfulness, highly censurable and criminal as, in itself considered, it has been—shall, by the bearing of Divine wisdom and Divine power thereupon, cause us the more enthusiastically to exclaim, "He hath done all things well;" and, with holy wonder and admiration, to testify, "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake."

The rescue of Joseph, by the hand of Reuben and Judah, at the time his brethren would have slain him, is richly marked with the timely interposing hand of our God, and proves how sovereignly and how graciously He may be at work on our behalf, whilst we at the same time have the least consciousness of the fact. This is another proof of the blessedness and the satisfaction of "walking by *faith*, and not by sight." How was Jehovah working both for Jacob and Joseph, whilst both the one and the other were

in entire ignorance of the mercy. What an indispensable link in the grand chain of covenant kindnesses was the very position in which both Joseph and Jacob were now placed. How *wisely* was God working, although, upon the surface, His providence would appear to be operating so *adversely*. How little could Joseph suppose, that his being seized by his brethren—threatened with death—then thrown into a pit—and subsequently being sold to the Midianites, was the very way—and the only way—in which those remarkable dreams of his were to be fulfilled, and his permanent and most prominent advancement secured. How little could the old patriarch imagine that that bloody coat of his poor favourite, but now, as he supposed, torn and mutilated boy, was only the early indication of his advancement to a post which was both to preserve himself, his family, and a nation at large from absolute destruction ; as well as to open up, most significantly, in type and figure, the person and work of Him who, in the fulness of time, was to be sold likewise for thirty pieces of silver—and, not by a merely figurative but an absolute death, rescue His brethren from everlasting destruction.

How touching is the language in which Jacob's position at this time is expressed : " And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood ; and they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father ; and said, This have we found : know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat ; an evil beast hath devoured

him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CHARACTER AND CONDUCT OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE OFTEN EXPOSED TO SEVEREST CRITICISM—TEMPTATIONS INTENDED AS TESTS—GOD THE DEFENDER OF HIS PEOPLE, AND THEIR DELIVERER IN HIS OWN TIME AND WAY—JOSEPH'S SOLD INTO EGYPT, BUT THE LORD WITH HIM—JOSEPH'S TEMPTATION AND RESISTANCE—JOSEPH IN PRISON, BUT FAVOUR SHOWN HIM THERE—THE PRISON JOSEPH'S PREPARATORY SCHOOL—WHEREVER GOD'S PEOPLE ARE THERE HE IS—GOD'S WAY THE BEST—HIS PEOPLE IN THE END ABUNDANTLY SATISFIED THEREWITH—DREAMS THE SOURCE OF JOSEPH'S TRIALS—DREAMS THE SPECIAL INSTRUMENTS OF HIS DELIVERANCE.

THE Lord's people—because *He* will have it so—are at times placed in circumstances and positions in which their characters are, as far as appearance goes, at stake. So strange and so peculiar are the workings of God's Providence in regard to them, that that very strangeness and peculiarity are ascribed to Divine displeasure, at the same time, it may be, that Jehovah is only working out, in His special and gracious way, the loving intentions of His own eternal mind with respect to them. "His judgments are a great deep." Well has it been asked, "Who by searching can find out God?" *Temptations* are oftentimes permitted of God, in order that they should

become *tests*; the seeming *doubt*, at times appertaining to principle, is only for the more striking *development* of principle; whilst man, judging from mere externals, *condemns*—God, not unfrequently, *condoles*. When at length matters have reached their climax, and the destruction of the tried one is anticipated, God's own gracious word is brought to pass, "For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; and will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him." He "brings forth their righteousness as the light, and their judgment as the noon-day." The Lord's tried and tempted will in due time realize the truth of His own word—"For He hath looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth; to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death" (Ps. cii. 19, 20).

Joseph is sold into Egypt; but, we are told, that "the Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man;" moreover, we read, that "the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake." In proof, however, of the fluctuating nature of all things here, as well as to allow principles to be tested, and to prove what God's grace can do, a temptation is set before Joseph—one not only congenial to his poor fallen flesh, but coming from such a source as might have led him to conclude the yielding thereto would, in some sense, have led to his advancement. But, ah! no, he was not allowed to take so low and so despicable a view of the matter. Possessed of the

fear of the Lord, and that fear brought into exercise in the most trying and critical of circumstances, he repels the tempter with a "How, then, can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Oh, admirable plea! most forcible and God-honouring of arguments! Regardless he of all consequences, and acting upon that first and greatest of principles, "Thou, God, seest me," he denies self, denies the tempter, and depends on his God for the issue. And what was that issue? Nought less than the being cast into prison, and that, too, upon the falsest and most groundless of charges. Here Reason may be rife again with argument—here Sense and man's puny judgment may have remonstrated. What returns, these, for honesty, sobriety, and steadfastness of character! What a sorry compensation this! "Deep calling unto deep!" First, banishment from a father's hearth—then being sold as a slave—and now consignment to a dreary dungeon, upon a charge of which he was absolutely innocent. But Joseph's God was with him even in a prison; for so it is recorded, that "the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison;" yea, "The keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper" (Gen. xxxix. 22, 23). Joseph not only had a teaching and training

to undergo in the prison, in order to qualify him for filling that all-important position to which he was eternally appointed; but, doubtless, he was to be made of inconceivable benefit to those committed to his care. Wherever a child of God is, there, in a very special manner, God is likewise, and that to instruct him—to comfort him—and to make use of him. He is not lost, not overlooked, nor are his labours in vain, whether they take the form of active service or passive suffering. In either case the Lord is with him, to sustain and bless.

To suppose that service supersedes sensitiveness, is incorrect; the woman of Shunem was so resigned a sufferer, that she answered, "It is well," when interrogated with regard to herself, her husband, and her child, and yet her soul was so bitter (margin) within her, that she caught the prophet by the feet. And Joseph so felt his position, that, notwithstanding the favour shown him in the prison, he said to Pharaoh's butler, when, according to Joseph's interpretation of his dream, he was about to be liberated, "Think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: for indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon" (Gen. xl. 14, 15).

We find that "two full years" passed over before the chief butler remembered Joseph; and that remembrance was brought about by God Him-

self, who, in connexion with two remarkable dreams which Pharaoh had had, led to the chief butler's exclaiming, "I do remember my faults this day:" when he directly detailed what had occurred two years previously, and so impressed Pharaoh with the facts as to induce him to send immediately to the prisoner, who, in due time, having interpreted the king's dreams, was raised to a post only second in importance to that of the crown itself.

Thus we see the completeness and the perfection of Jehovah's working; that, whilst he takes His own time, and adopts His own course, He does, at length, produce an effect worthy His wisdom, power, love, and faithfulness. Man may be in haste, and misjudge Him, whilst He works and waits, but the issue invariably has been, and shall be, that which shall at once be glorifying to God, and unspeakably satisfactory to His people. Infinitely better pleased are they with *God's* way than they would have been with *their own*. What would Joseph have been, how little qualified for his after-position, if he had not had, first, to encounter the enmity of his brethren, and next his service in Potiphar's, and in the prison-house? Each and every circumstance afforded him an insight into character, so requisite for coming events, and proved the most wholesome training and discipline. But for this, he would have been altogether unfitted for what he was both to be and to do. How gracious, therefore, was the Lord unto him; and who knows, reader—yea, there is every reason to suppose that such is the case—that the

self-same Lord is working by your trials and your afflictions with the same merciful and gracious object in view. He is guiding—He is guarding; and, be assured, that if your heart is Zion-ward and Christ-ward, whatever may be the special path by which the Lord is leading you, or whatever that course of training and discipline to which you are called, the result shall be God's glory, and your own unbounded satisfaction.

There is a further lesson or two we would not overlook with respect to Joseph's imprisonment, and liberation, and advancement. First, it was dreams which were instrumentally the source of his distress; it was dreams which were the special means of deliverance and advancement. Secondly, observe his jealousy for Jehovah's honour. He had aforetime interpreted both the chief butler's and the chief baker's dream; but, when called to interpret the king's, he would not take the credit of the interpretation to himself, but honestly avowed, "It is not in *me*; God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Then it was afterwards seen that God was mindful of His word: "Him that honoureth me I will honour, whilst he that despiseth me shall be lightly esteemed."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

REPETITION OF TRIAL AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY—THE HUMBLING OF THE HEART NO VERY SUMMARY PROCESS—JACOB'S PROPOSAL TO HIS SONS TO GO IN QUEST OF CORN—THE RESERVE OF BENJAMIN, TYPICAL OF OUR VARIOUS HEART-RESERVES—CREATURE IDOLATRY—NO GOING TO JOSEPH WITHOUT THE YOUNGER BROTHER, SO NO GOING TO THE THRONE OF GRACE WITHOUT CHRIST—JESUS SPEAKING ROUGHLY, AS DID JOSEPH, YET LOVING HIS BRETHREN NEVERTHELESS—JOSEPH WANTED NOT THEIR MONEY BUT THEIR PERSONS, SO CHRIST WANTS NOT OUR WORKS, BUT OURSELVES.

It is by no short and simple process the self-will and rebellion of the human heart is controlled. As we have already stated, it requires a repetition of trials and a succession of sorrows to "bring down the heart with labour." The humbling of the heart, and the bringing its corruptions to the surface, in order to show both the need and the nature of divine grace, in its rich and glorious operations, must be accomplished by naught less than divine power.

Reduced to the very brink of ruin, by means of that famine which Joseph, under God, had fore-shown should for a long time prevail, the venerable patriarch proposes to his sons to go down into Egypt to buy corn, for he had heard that it was to be ob-

tained there. But, though the ten brethren went down into Egypt for that purpose, Benjamin, the younger, was not permitted to go, "lest, peradventure," said his father, "mischief should befall *him*." Here again was partiality—here a reserve—which bespoke but too plainly, that, notwithstanding all the significancy and severity of his teachings, Jacob was not yet cured of his idolatry. His heart was not absolutely and entirely the Lord's.

Who of us but what must fall under the self-same condemnation? Who can say he is exempt from this creature-choice and creature-carefulness? Who of us, if deprived of one and another object of love and interest, but what seeks with additional tenacity to secure more effectually those who remain? And does not the consciousness of this arouse—and becomingly, too—an anxiety lest in the thus laying too great stress upon the creature, such affection shall be checked by either the marring or the removal of the object? Well did one say, "Beware of the little idols in white frocks;" and well might it be added, Beware of the idols of more matured age and more developed disposition, appearance, and principles. How ready is Satan to ply the human heart with temptations adapted to every capacity, condition, and circumstance, and how does he change his tactics in order to meet times and temperaments!

"Joseph was the governor over the land," when his brethren went down into Egypt, to buy corn. "And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not

him. And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. We are all one man's sons; we are true men, thy servants are no spies. And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come. And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not."

What a blank was here! what a cloud of guilt must have settled down upon the conscience at this juncture! How must that which had been accumulating month after month and year after year, during which these brethren had sought to conceal from their father the actual state of things, have swelled as it were into an almost insupportable burden and weight of anguish, at this moment of peril, when they knew not but, before such an authority, they should be called to surrender their lives as spies. "One is not." What relief might have been given—what hope imparted of his lost one being still in the land of the living—had facts been communicated to the patriarch. How hardening is the nature of sin, and how is one act of disobedience and transgression sought to be covered by another! and thus does sin increase in weight and magnitude. How callous must these brethren have been, in that they could witness their father's anguish and remain silent as to Joseph's not having been slain by wild beasts!

But now, when called unexpectedly to confront him, at the same time ignorant as to who he was, they tremble on account of the perilous position in which they are placed : " And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies : hereby ye shall be proved : By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither. Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you : or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies. And he put them altogether into ward three days. And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live ; for I fear God : If ye be true men, let one of your brethren be bound in the house of your prison : go ye, carry corn for the famine of your houses : but bring your youngest brother unto me ; so shall your words be verified, and ye shall not die. And they did so. And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear ; therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child ; and ye would not hear ? therefore, behold, also his blood is required. And they knew not that Joseph understood them ; for he spake unto them by an interpreter. And he turned himself about from them, and wept ; and returned to them again, and communed with them, and took from them Simeon, and bound him before

their eyes. Then Joseph commanded to fill their sacks with corn, and to restore every man's money into his sack, and to give them provision for the way : and thus did he unto them."

Reader, observe that, though in very many particulars Joseph himself was an eminent type of Christ, yet Benjamin was here a type of Christ also, inasmuch as He is "the younger Brother"—for He is younger in point of the new birth—concerning whom God the Father says, in all our applications at the throne of grace, "Bring your youngest Brother unto me." As Pharaoh said to the famine-stricken applicants, "Go unto Joseph," so the Father says, "Go unto Christ," or, "Bring your youngest Brother unto me." And how wise was the after-resolution of Joseph's brethren, after communing with their father about going down into Egypt: "If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food: but if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down: for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you." Be assured, reader, this is virtually the language of God the Father. The only way in which He can treat with a poor sinner, is in and through the person of Christ. Out of Christ our "God is a consuming fire." Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life: No man cometh unto the Father but by Him." "There is one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus." "There is no other name under heaven given among men." Christ and Him crucified is the sinner's only hope.

Reader, have you sought to obtain corn without taking by faith the younger Brother with you? Well indeed then may you have been foiled. Your disappointment is easily to be accounted for.

Oh, ye poor and needy ones, be it yours ever to approach the Throne of grace, in the name of a precious Christ, pleading His blood-shedding, which alone has atoned for transgression, and His imputed righteousness, by which alone you can stand comely and acceptable in the sight of a holy God. Realizing this by faith, as granted you by the sovereign operation of the Holy Ghost, you may sing—

“ Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in these array'd,
With joy shall I lift up mine head.

“ Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who aught to my charge can lay?
Fully absolv'd through Thee I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame.”

Again, dear reader, see, too, that you learn this lesson from this most touching and instructive history; that, though Joseph, or Jesus, be your Brother, He may speak roughly (margin, hard things), yet He is, at the same time, prompted by the tenderest of love and the sweetest of sympathy. He may take measures for bringing our sin to remembrance, in order that we may know somewhat of its enormity, and what it cost Him in order to atone for transgression; and He may delay the manifestation of Himself, as Joseph

did with regard to his brethren, but this only that He should render our feelings the more acute, and additionally endear Himself by that manifestation. Delays are no denials; and, however long we may be kept in waiting for the revelation of Himself, that very delay shall contribute to the opening out of His glory, and the well-being of our souls.

Notwithstanding that they secured the object for which they had gone down into Egypt—the obtaining of corn—yet how fearful must have been the position of the sons of Jacob, in returning to their father with another brother missing. How strikingly does one feature run through this whole history—that of *relationship*. They presented money to Joseph, in a way of purchase; but he rejected that. “Restore every man’s money into his sack;” and, in proof of that tenderness and consideration of which we just now spoke, even though not as yet made known unto them, he adds, “Give them provision for the way.” Jesus *feeds* whilst He *flogs*. He turns about to weep at the very time He is speaking roughly to His brethren. Again, with regard to this relationship, Jacob sees the corn and the bundles of money, but he is, nevertheless, not satisfied. Hence he exclaims, “Ye have bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.” Relationship! what did Joseph want? The person, his younger brother, Benjamin, and the person, his good old father, Jacob. What did the patriarch want? Not the corn—not the money—but the persons—his sons, Joseph and

Simeon. So, reader, as the money was rejected—for Joseph wanted it not—neither does Jesus want our fancied good works or fleshly doings: it is our persons—our very selves—as near to Him and dear to Him—that He looks for and delights in. Hence He says, “Let me see thy face, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE HUMBLING-PROCESS—CREATURE-RESERVES—JACOB AND HIS BENJAMIN—STRONGER MEASURES NEEDED—GOD AT NO LOSS TO KNOW HOW TO BRING DOWN THE PRIDE AND THE SELF-WILL OF HIS PEOPLE—THE SURETYSHIP OF JUDAH FOR BENJAMIN SO TYPICAL OF THE SURETYSHIP OF CHRIST FOR HIS CHURCH—TRANSFER OF THE RESPONSIBILITY FROM THE CHURCH TO CHRIST—DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE PROPOSALS OF REUBEN AND JUDAH—JOSEPH'S POLICY IN THE NON-REVEALING HIMSELF TO HIS BRETHREN.

IN that most comprehensive 107th Psalm we read, "He brought down their heart with labour; they fell down, and there was none to help them;" again we read, in the 32nd of Deuteronomy, and the 36th verse, that "the Lord shall judge His people, and repent Himself for His servants, when He seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left." Nor will the Lord manifestly work whilst there is any reserve—He will not have a divided heart. Sooner or later He will bring His people to say,

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee."

Jacob has his idol still ; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, but he has his Benjamin, nor will he resign him until compelled so to do. The very strongest measures must be adopted, in order to bring him into a spirit of compliance. He remains stedfast, firm, resolute, to the last. He was determined to abide by his resolve: "My son"—as if he had but one son, so intent was he upon *him*—"shall not go down with you ; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone : if mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave." It has been well said, that "*Man proposes, but God disposes.*"

Reader, we may (Jacob like) deal very freely with our *wills* and our *shalls* ; but God will not be moved by myriads of them, if so be they in the leastwise clash with the purposes of His eternal mind, and the provisions of His eternal covenant. "Heaven and earth," He says, "shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away."

"Firm as a rock His truth shall stand,
When rolling years shall cease to move."

The 43rd chapter of Genesis opens in this graphic way : "And the famine was sore in the land ;" and such was the change wrought in the mind of the patriarch during the interval between the close of the 42nd and the commencement of the 43rd chapters, that, when their stock of corn was exhausted, from very necessity he is obliged to moderate the tone in which he had previously spoken, and, as it were,

gently and persuasively, he says, "Go again, buy us a *little* food."

Ah, reader, whatever our position—however great *our* independence, resolution, or would-be self-sufficiency—our God knows how to bring us down. *He* can soon humble us—He can reduce us to the very dust of self-distrust and creature-loathing. He knows how to bring about that alone safe and satisfactory state of soul, which prompts the possessor to exclaim, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help; my help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth."

"And Judah spake unto him, saying, The man did solemnly protest unto us, saying, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. If thou wilt send our brother with us, we will go down and buy thee food: but if thou wilt not send him, we will not go down: for the man said unto us, Ye shall not see my face, except your brother be with you. And Israel said, Wherefore dealt ye so ill with me, as to tell the man whether ye had yet a brother?"

Here was reserve again, and a most criminal reserve too. The language suggests prevarication, to say the least, if not a wish that they had absolutely denied having another brother. Mark, reader, of what the human heart is capable, when left to itself. There is no connivance and no sin to which it will not yield, unless God graciously be our Preserver therefrom. Such a course as that now virtually countenanced and contended for by Jacob, was cen-

surable to the last degree. It was part and parcel of, and in precise keeping with, Jacob's *natural character*, which lacked straightforwardness and outspokenness. Hence, as we have before intimated, Jacob must be a peculiarly tried man throughout his days. And God's having dwelt at such length upon his character is with a view of holding him up to posterity as a beacon in some particulars, as well as a blessing in others. In contemplating the patriarch's character, we may be admonished by it wherein he was left to the indulgence of his own will, and the adoption of his own fleshly ideas, plans, and purposes; but we may be encouraged, when considering him under the special guidance and direction of God. When denying self, and forsaking the natural for the spiritual, Jacob—made so by grace—was a beautiful character.

In answer to the patriarch's reflection upon his sons having said that they had yet another brother, "They said, The man asked us straitly of our state, and of our kindred, saying, Is your father yet alive? have ye another brother? And we told him according to the tenor of these words: could we certainly know that he would say, Bring your brother down?"

Now follows that which is so peculiarly interesting and important, and in which the suretyship of Christ is so strikingly set forth. The reader will do well, whilst reading the annexed verses, to go back into eternity past, and, substituting the great Antitype for the type—Jesus for Judah—behold Him standing

forth as the covenant Surety for His Church, and declaring Himself as pledged to bring her back from all the direful consequences of the Adam-fall transgression, or else He would "bear the blame for ever." And, as there was a virtual transfer of the responsibility of the return of Benjamin, from Benjamin himself and from his brethren, to Judah, and to Judah only, so there was an entire transfer of all guilt, and all the weighty entailments connected with the bringing back of the Church from the Egypt of this world to the heavenly Canaan, from the Church itself to the Church's great and glorious Surety, Christ; and, after such a covenant compact as that He entered into before the world began, had not Christ fulfilled to the very letter all that He had covenanted to accomplish, He would have "borne the blame for ever." It was by virtue of this engagement that the Old Testament saints were admitted to glory, before the incarnation of Christ; and, had He failed in the fulfilment of His covenant engagements, such must have thenceforth been excluded from that bliss to which, instrumentally by the eye of their faith being fixed upon the person and work of Christ, they had attained. Unquestionably it was in order that in that early day the great and glorious doctrine of the Suretyship of Christ should be proclaimed, that the Holy Ghost thus dwelt at large upon the various details connected with Jacob's caution and Judah's suretyship. "And Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we

may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever."

We would have the reader remember, that, vast as was the offer made by Reuben, in that he said to his father with regard to Benjamin, "Slay my two sons if I bring him not to thee," it availed not. It was a great proposal, but not great enough—not personal enough. It had to do with *his*, but not, in a sense, with Reuben *himself*. Not so the offer of Judah. He says, "If *I* bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let *me* bear the blame for ever." It was as emphatic as it could be. Nothing could be more personal, specific, or self-sacrificing. Judah said this under the keen recollection of what he, as one member of a family, had had to endure during the many years' absence of Joseph his brother. He knew full well how that home of his had been desolated because "Joseph was not;" and full well he knew also, that, if by any possibility Benjamin should be lacking, how fearful would be the consequences. He knew, too, how extremely hazardous was the proposal. Simeon was now left in ward, and how could he tell what were the intentions of Joseph—the man who had spoken so roughly unto him and his brethren? To what motive could he ascribe his intense anxiety for the bringing down of their younger brother? How com-

pletely was the whole enshrouded in mystery! All this vastly contributed to the enhancing the pledge he made to his father of again bringing Benjamin with him. In our contemplations of the subject, let us seek, for a moment, to exclude our knowledge of the issue of all these proceedings, and endeavour to reflect upon the scene as it then was. All dark—all mysterious;—the future—yea, even the morrow—completely hidden. On the one side, the father, broken-hearted as regards Joseph, concerned as respects Simeon, blindly determined about Benjamin: on the other hand, the anxious and secretly-oppressed, conscience-smitten sons: round and about all, a famine threatening the destruction of the whole. How critical these circumstances!

But may they not well lead us from the less to the greater? Had Joseph seen fit so to do, how easily might he have spared both his father and his brethren all this pain. One word from him would have superseded this suspense. Humanly speaking, the course he pursued was hazardous. His father's already chastened heart might have given way under the additional privation of Simeon, and the expectant loss of Benjamin. That state of things of which he testified, "the bringing down his gray hairs with sorrow to the grave," might in very deed have come to pass, and then how intense the disappointment and keen the sorrow of Joseph. May we not, therefore, see by the line of policy he pursued—prompted, as doubtless he was in all he did, by wisdom from on high—that He

of whom Joseph was but a type intended thus to proclaim to His brethren, in every after age, what was His pleasure in leading them so mysteriously, in testing their principles, trying their faith, and subjecting them to a course of discipline apparently so directly opposed to the dictates of a living interest and a tender solicitude and regard?

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CONDUCT OF JOSEPH GROUND OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO THOSE WHO ARE IN PERPLEXITY, AND WAITING FOR THE MANIFESTATION OF JESUS—THE CHANGE IN JACOB'S RESOLVES—HIS HEART BROUGHT DOWN WITH LABOUR—THE GREAT I SUBDUED—EXAMPLE OF THE BRINGING-DOWN PROCESS—FIGURE—SURRENDER—ACQUIESCENCE—PEACE—APPEAL TO THE READER—ILLUSTRATION OF NON-SUBMISSION UNDER BEREAVING CIRCUMSTANCES—THE PATRIARCH'S ENTIRE SURRENDER—DELIVERANCE, IN CONSEQUENCE, AT HAND—JACOB'S IGNORANCE OF WHO "THE MAN" WAS—THE PEOPLE OF GOD'S IGNORANCE OF WHO IT IS THAT IS SO MYSTERIOUSLY BUT YET MERCIFULLY DEALING WITH THEM.

How well may the conduct of Joseph encourage the Lord's people to pause ere they come to too hasty conclusions as to the "Why am I thus?" In clearer light—under fuller development—when by little and little Jehovah's purposes shall be accomplished, then shall be seen even by those who are now so perplexed and anxious as to who they are or why so led, that every step of the journey, and each incident by the way, has been directed and controlled by wisdom infinite, and love, and grace, and mercy worthy of a God!

"And their father Israel said unto them, If it must be so now, do this; take of the best fruits in

the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds: and take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight: take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man."

Reader, do mark the striking contrast between the verse just quoted, and that with which the previous chapter is closed.

"And he said, My son shall not go down with you."	"Take also your brother, and arise, go unto the man."
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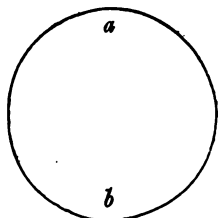
See you not here the proof of what we before stated, how in the issue the Lord brings down His people? The great *I*—the *shall* and the *will* of the creature—must give way, sooner or later, before the Lord's loving and gracious, but at the same time determinate, discipline. And the sooner the great *I* is subdued, the spirit humbled, and the soul led to exclaim, "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt," the sooner will relief be experienced, and peace enjoyed. "In quietness and in confidence shall be their strength."

We remember a case in which the Lord was teaching one of His servants some important lessons in a way extremely mortifying and painful to flesh and blood. After a long-continued series of trial of the most anxious and perplexing character, in which heart and flesh were continually failing, and in re-

gard to which the tried one oftentimes mentally exclaimed, "One half-ounce more burden, Lord, without additional strength to bear it, and sink I must;" the Lord laid His hand upon a child—a lovely little boy. He was seized with convulsions, but speedily recovered, and it was fondly hoped that all was well. A few days after, however, the child was seized again, and died! It was a tremendous blow! All other trials seemed trivial to this. The whole were absorbed in the one. Recovering, at length, from the stunning effects of that fearful and unexpected stroke, there followed heartfelt congratulation. It was a child, and, as such, very near and dear; but it was not the wife—not the early-loved and tender bosom-companion, the sharer of one's joys, and the helper in one's sorrows: no, no, it was not her, blessed be God! A few months only, however, passed away, ere symptoms of decay manifested themselves in regard to this loved one, whom the heart reserved, and around whom the spirit entwined with a tenacity that would seem to defy severance under any circumstances. Other loved offspring there were, but the *companion* and the *helpmeet* was the all-absorbing source of solicitude. Each new symptom of decay was beheld with intense anxiety, and sought to be warded off, until at length assuming a decided and unquestionable form, the anxious observer mentally exclaimed, "Then I'll die, too:" and, alas for blinded and too often presumptuous human nature, he sought to catch the malady! But, before the companion in question was removed, first one and then

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another precious child was taken. Then followed the mother. One child—and one alone—was left. But then came the struggle; and here that surrender and acquiescence, to insist upon the necessity for which we have introduced the illustration. When thus left bereaved, and all but broken-hearted, the individual in question had his position thus presented to him. He stood, say *a*, upon the outer side of a circle; on the opposite side (*b*) was a certain



spot called *Submission*. Now it was felt that until that spot was reached, there could be no satisfaction—no peace—no rest; and it was seen, moreover, that if one travelled to the right hand or to the left, that is, round the circle, the distance would be so much the greater, and the time occupied in going so much the longer; but that if one had grace to strike directly across the circle, both time and trouble would be saved. In this simple way, the Lord opened the subject, and by its means as instrumental brought the bereaved and mourning one to exclaim, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." And, though the surrender was so to speak in the dark, the reason of

the dispensation could not be seen or understood; yet afterwards it was duly opened, and the Lord's wisdom and mercy became the more striking and apparent.

Do we happen to address one who, in similar circumstances of bereavement, is fretting against the Lord, and encouraging hard thoughts of Him and His dealings? Such an one will never find peace or contentment or satisfaction whilst thus contending with the Lord, and thus practically disputing His perfect right to do as He will with His own.

We know a case where the grave of a departed wife is resorted to every day and under all circumstances. A half-hour or thereabouts is regularly passed in tending the little garden-plot set over her mouldering body. All this bespeaks a want of reconciliation—a lack of due surrender to Him who gave and had a perfect right to take away. Did we happen to meet with that bereaved one, we should seek as delicately and as tenderly as possible to tell of the rebuke one under similar circumstances once met—and which proved an effectual check to that mode of betraying his creature idolatry, “Why seek ye the living among the dead? (she) is not here, but is risen.”

Notwithstanding, then, the *self-will* of the patriarch under the previous circumstances, when he exclaimed, “My son shall not go down with you,” “his heart is now brought down by *labour* ;” and, in *submission* to the will of God, he exclaims, “Take also your brother, and arise, go unto the man.” Then, in

contrast to his policy of a *present* with his balm, and honey, and myrrh, and his "double money" in their hand for *purchase*, he adds what was infinitely better, and far, far more acceptable—yea, it was the very climax of blessing—the sure forerunner of full and free deliverance, "and God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved." Here was surrender—here submission—yea, more, acquiescence. Now, and not until now, the patriarch bows to the divine will, and virtually says, "Thy will be done." But how little did he know who "the man" was of whom he spoke! How utterly ignorant was he of the near and endearing relationship that existed between himself and "the man!" How far beyond his utmost hopes and expectations (whatever they might occasionally or momentarily have been since last he saw his much-loved Joseph), that "the man" was none other than his long-lost and painfully-mourned-for son!

And so it is, reader, in a Gospel sense; how little do the Lord's people imagine, under their various trials, and in those particular courses of service and of suffering through which an unseen but divine hand leads them, that their elder Brother has the direction and the control of all. How little do the voyagers upon the tempestuous waters of this world conceive that "their Father is at the helm," as "they mount up to the heavens, and go down again to the depths; their soul melted because of trouble; and

they reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end." But ah, the Captain of salvation says, at length, "Peace, be still!" and then His tempest-tossed and affrighted ones know what it is for Him to "make the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still." And "then are they glad, because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven."

Reader, it is so, and the Lord's people, without a solitary exception, in due time realize and enjoy the mercy.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE PATRIARCH'S SURRENDERING BENJAMIN, AND HIS GOING DOWN INTO EGYPT WITH HIS BRETHREN—JACOB BROUGHT TO LOOK BEYOND SECOND CAUSES, AND RESIGNING HIMSELF TO THE DIVINE WILL—SUCH POSITION A BLESSED ONE—THE BRETHREN BRINGING BENJAMIN WITH THEM TYPICAL OF POOR SINNERS BRINGING CHRIST WITH THEM IN THEIR APPEALS AT THE MERCY-SEAT—EVERY POOR SINNER WELCOME WHOSE HEART AND WHOSE EYE IS UPON CHRIST—HOW BLESSED THUS TO “STAND BEFORE JOSEPH”—JOSEPH’S ACTS MISINTERPRETED, AND SO THE ACTS OF JESUS—JEHOVAH’S “FEAR NOTS”—THEIR PRECIOUSNESS AND SUITABILITY—JOSEPH REFRAINING HIMSELF BEFORE HIS BRETHREN—JESUS DELAYING THE REVELATION OF HIMSELF, BUT ONLY THE MORE BLESSEDLY IN DUE TIME TO DISCOVER HIMSELF TO THE REDEEMED.

IN our last chapter we spoke of the great change wrought in the patriarch’s mind. Not merely by the force of those circumstances of which God had the direction and control, was Jacob brought to surrender Benjamin, but with regard to that surrender, in contrast to what he had previously said, “Me have ye bereaved of my children”—thus looking at second causes and at second causes only—he now exclaims, “If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved;” thus was he brought to commit all into the Lord’s hand, and to resign himself to the divine will. As a

natural (or rather a certain spiritual) consequence, the issue, in all its blessedness and satisfaction, shall soon be seen. The one is sure speedily to follow the other in the grand economy of salvation, and in those peculiar but precious ways in which the Lord deals with His people.

We read, that "the men took that present, and they took double money in their hand, and Benjamin; and rose up, and went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph."

Reader, cannot you imagine with what hope and satisfaction they thus resorted to Egypt? They came now in distinct and direct compliance with the suggestions of Joseph. They had "the younger brother" with them; and, although they knew not why he was so anxiously sought for, yet they were furnished thereby with this appeal, "We have obeyed; we are here as counselled to be."

Now how well is it for poor sinners—guilty, and perplexed, and perfectly at a loss as they may be to comprehend the result—to be resorting to the throne in quest of the good old corn of the kingdom with which to nourish the poor famine-smitten souls; to be coming thus with "the younger Brother with them." In other words, to have the heart and the eye simply directed to and set upon the person and work of a precious Christ, the Man whom the Father delighteth to honour; who said, in the days of His flesh, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye Him." Yea, the Man Christ Jesus, who Himself said, "I am the way, and

the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me ;” and again, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else.”

Reader, in this Gospel and most comprehensive sense, how sweet is it to be said respecting the brethren of Him of whom the patriarch was but a type, that “they stood before Joseph.” Ah, blessed position—even though guilty, self-condemned, and for a time ignorant of the issue. “And when Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the ruler of his house, Bring these men home, and slay, and make ready ; for these men shall dine with me at noon. And the man did as Joseph bade ; and the man brought the men into Joseph’s house. And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph’s house ; and they said, Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in ; that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses.”

Ah, how often are the greater than Joseph’s most gracious acts thus misinterpreted. The brethren were to be brought into Joseph’s house, and they were to dine with him : thus there was to be a fellowship and a familiarity to which previously they had been entire strangers ; but they altogether misconstrue such condescension and kindness. “He does it,” say they, “that he may seek occasion against us, and fall upon us, and take us for bondmen, and our asses.”

Reader, if long in the school of Christ, do you not know something personally and painfully of having thus misjudged and maligned your elder Brother? Ah, in regard to some of His most tender, merciful, and gracious dealings, have you not often thought He intended thereby to *destroy* rather than to *deliver*—to *curse* rather than to *bless*? With respect to the “standing before Joseph,” and being invited into his house to dine, cannot you bear testimony that Manoah was not the only one who said, “We shall surely die, because we have seen God?” Oh, how did the brethren of Joseph wish themselves at home again, and far, far away from where they now were.

Mark their anxiety. “And they came near to the steward of Joseph’s house, and they communed with him at the door of the house, and said, O sir, we came indeed down at the first time to buy food: and it came to pass, when we came to the inn, that we opened our sacks, and, behold, every man’s money was in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight: and we have brought it again in our hand. And other money have we brought down in our hands to buy food: we cannot tell who put our money in our sacks. And he said, Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them.”

See the pitifulness of our God. ‘He *loads*, but never *overloads*. He *distresses* His children, but never *destroys*. Whilst He *smites*, He *soothes*. Jesus may seemingly say hard and harsh things, and

His movements may be most mysterious; but His steward—His servant—knowing Him, and loving Him, and having confidence in Him, shall be commissioned to comfort and to cheer: “Peace be to you! fear not.” Oh, how timely must that “fear not” have been to the brethren. And when is it that Jehovah’s “fear nots” are so precious? Is it not when His people are exposed to circumstances of fear, and the subjects of fear? Ah, then, then, as spoken home by His stewards, under His own direction and power, how sweet and how suitable do they become. What little weight would these self-same words have had with Joseph’s brethren, at their first visit, compared with their significance and importance now. Does not this prove, dear reader, that we must be brought into circumstances of trial and perplexity, with flesh and heart failing, in order to know and blessedly to realize the preciousness and the power of Jehovah’s “fear nots?”

“I had your money,” said Joseph’s steward; “but,” as if he would say, “*that* was of no consequence.” It was not that which was wanted. Poor sinner, it is not your *works*, nor your *words*, that Jesus wants; but *yourself*—yes, your *own very self*. We know it may seem to you an impossibility, but it is, nevertheless, true. Yes, indeed, we may sing—

“Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore.
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity join’d with power.
He is able;
He is willing: doubt no more.”

Also,

“ Let not conscience make you linger ;
Nor of fitness fondly dream.
All the fitness He requireth
Is, to feel your need of Him :
This He gives you ;
’Tis the Spirit’s rising beam.”

And,

“ Come, ye weary, heavy laden,
Bruis’d and mangled by the fall ;
If you tarry till you’re better,
You will never come at all.
Not the righteous ;
Sinners Jesus came to call.”

“ And the man brought the men into Joseph’s house, and gave them water, and they washed their feet ; and he gave their asses provender. And they made ready the present against Joseph came at noon : for they heard that they should eat bread there. And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth. And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake ? Is he yet alive ?”

Reader, does it not seem strange that as yet there appears not to be the slightest suspicion upon the part of Joseph’s brethren, as to some special and peculiar interest prompting all these inquiries ? The fact was, that there was guilt upon their mind. They were self-condemned, and in this condition they could not comprehend, much less estimate, such dealings. So it is with poor sinners under legal

bondage, and whilst yet in a state of doubt and apprehension. They cannot as yet appreciate the Lord's tender words and gracious works in relation to them. They must know who He is, and be admitted to a knowledge of their blessed relationship, before they can becomingly estimate His doings.

"And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance. And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son. And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there."

Reader, as we have before asked you, substitute Jesus for Joseph here! and contemplate a precious Christ weeping from veriest love and tenderest interest over His erring, anxious, but as yet non-recognizing brethren. Longing to declare Himself, yet delaying, for a wise and gracious purpose, so to do. When the whole case was opened out, how profound does the wisdom of Joseph appear in regard to his policy in hiding the relation in which he stood to his brethren; and so, when the Lord's purposes are more fully revealed, what infinite wisdom, and kindness, and mercy will be seen as inseparably connected with His every movement, both in providence and grace. Perfection will be stamped upon the whole, and with it the greatest possible amount of tenderest

sympathy and loving compassion. There shall not be the veriest semblance of a failure or a flaw, but the every feature and the every aspect connected with all the minute details of the way by which He has led shall magnify His wisdom, and love, and grace ; and minister to the wondering, and admiring, and adoring contemplations of His redeemed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JOSEPH'S SELF-RESTRAINT—HIS SEEMINGLY-UNACCOUNTABLE DELAY
IN THE DECLARATION OF HIMSELF AS THE LONG-LOST BROTHER
—THE AFFECTING INTERVIEW BETWEEN JOSEPH AND HIS BRE-
THREN—JOSEPH'S GRATEFUL REVIEW OF ALL THE TRYING CIR-
CUMSTANCES THROUGH WHICH HE HAD BEEN CALLED TO PASS—
A QUESTION NATURALLY ARISING AS TO HOW IT WAS THAT
JOSEPH, IN HIS EXALTATION, HAD NOT SOONER INQUIRED AFTER
HIS FATHER AND HIS BRETHREN—JOSEPH A TYPE OF CHRIST
IN SEEKING TO BRING CONVICTION UPON THE MINDS OF HIS
BRETHREN—CONCEALED SINS—NO FORGIVENESS WITHOUT CON-
VICTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT—ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE SOR-
ROWING SUPPLIANT.

WE never read the touching account of Joseph and his brethren, without being struck with the amount of self-restraint he exercised, in that he so long and so resolutely withheld the declaration of who he was. The scene must have been of the most affecting character, when "he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son," and then, from the depths of his emotions, exclaimed, "God be gracious unto thee, my son." How much *he* felt the interview is evident from the fact, that he was compelled to "make haste, for his bowels did yearn upon his brother; and he sought where to

weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there."

What a vast train of circumstances must have then sprung up before his astounded and admiring view. What a contrast his present position with that when, in his simplicity, he stood before his father and his brethren and told out his dreams; or when, at a somewhat later period, he besought them to pity him, and restore him to his father. By what a strange—seemingly contradictory—but yet most merciful and gracious way had he since been conducted; and now, satisfied that his venerable father was still alive, and that his brethren, and Benjamin too, were near at hand, he gladly sought in secret to pour out his heart in tears of gratitude and holy admiration before Him to whom he was indebted for all the mercy, and all the grace and favour which had been so richly bestowed upon him.

Considering his exaltation, and the means which he must necessarily have had at command, we have often wondered how it was that Joseph had not earlier sought to ascertain how it fared with his kindred. It is possible that he had heard, by some means, of their welfare; or he may have taken for granted, that the pressure produced by the far-spread famine would, in common with others, soon bring them to him in quest of corn. Be this as it may, we must not lose sight of the typical character in which Joseph stood to Christ; and, in his dealings with his brethren, is clearly foreshown also that

course which Jesus pursues for the purpose of bringing home conviction of sin upon the hearts of His people, and a corresponding acknowledgment of their iniquity and transgression. Candid as, in some respects, Joseph's brethren had been, and true as was their statement as to who they were, and whence they came, still that wrong which they had done to himself remained to be told. Hence his continued policy in order to bring them to a feeling sense of their guilt, and a becoming confession of the same, Thus was to be foreshown the pity, and love, and forgiveness which await the repentant sinner, as it is written, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

We find, from the 44th chapter, that when Joseph's brethren were about a second time to return to their father, he commissions the steward of his house again to place each man's money in his sack, but, in addition to his corn money, Joseph's cup was to be put into Benjamin's sack; and then, soon after they had departed on their journey, he was to pursue them, and charge them with the wrong. So little did Joseph's brethren suspect the state of things in which they were about to find themselves, that, when thus overtaken, they exclaimed, "With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen. And he said, Now also let it be according unto your words: he with whom it is found shall be my servant; and ye shall be blameless. Then they speedily took down every

man his sack to the ground, and opened every man his sack. And he searched, and began at the eldest, and left at the youngest: and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. Then they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city. And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house; for he was yet there; and they fell before him on the ground. And Joseph said unto them, What deed is this that ye have done? wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine? And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants." This was an acknowledgment far exceeding all that had gone before. Here was the unravelling—here the opening out—here a frank and full confession of some act or acts that lay near the heart and oppressed the conscience. The very expression implies that there had been connivance and concealment: "God hath *found out* the iniquity." They knew that they were guiltless as far as the present charge was concerned. They felt that it was *God's* hand, and that it was *He*, in His own special and peculiar way, was bringing forth to the light the sin they had so long and so perseveringly sought to conceal. Hence they stood guilty and self-condemned.

Reader, from this part of the history may we learn the lesson so strikingly put before us in that Scripture, "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. xxviii. 13).

Do we happen to address any who are attempting to cloak or conceal sin? Such will find no peace—no rest—no satisfaction, in so doing. There must be the full and frank acknowledgment of it before relief upon Gospel grounds can be experienced.

Reader, do observe the force and the beauty of the words given in the last chapter of the prophet Hosea: "O Israel, *return* unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. *Take with you words* [mark this], and *turn to the Lord*: say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses: neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy." Then observe the gracious intimation and most encouraging assurance: "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found. Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the Lord are right, and the

just shall walk in them : but the transgressors shall fall therein."

In answer to the statement, "We are my lord's servants," Joseph said, "God forbid that I should do so : but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant ; and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father." Then, as though touched to the quick, and bereft of every hope and divested of all confidence, as a last resource "Judah came near unto him," in the intensity of his grief, in the very depths of his anguish, in the intenseness of his extremity, and makes the following most affecting appeal. A more touching scene—a more ardent appeal—is certainly not to be found.

"Then Judah [he who was specially the surety] came near unto him, and said, Oh, my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant : for thou art even as Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father or a brother ? And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one ; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father : for if he should leave his father, his father would die. And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more. And it came to pass when we

came up unto thy servant my father, we told him the words of my lord. And our father said, Go again, and buy us a little food. And we said, We cannot go down; if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man's face, except our youngest brother be with us. And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons: and the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I saw him not since: and if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Now therefore, when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life; it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave. For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren. For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JOSEPH'S DEALINGS WITH HIS BRETHREN—HIS EVIDENT INSIGHT INTO THEIR RESERVE AND DUPLICITY AS FAR AS THEIR FORMER TREATMENT OF HIM WAS CONCERNED—THE LESSON INCULCATED BY THIS CONCEALMENT—CANDOUR AND CONFESSION, AS PROMPTED BY THE HOLY GHOST, THE FORERUNNER OF CONSOLATION—JOSEPH'S DECLARATION OF HIMSELF—AFFECTING SCENE—GOD'S HAND RECOGNIZED—LOVING MESSAGES TO HIS FATHER—THE PRECIOUS EFFECTS OF THE REALIZATION OF DIVINE FORGIVENESS—THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE REDEEMED BOTH HERE AND HERE-AFTER.

MATTERS, at the close of the last chapter, had reached their climax. Joseph had sought, and at last attained, his object. He would have his brethren brought down into the very depths of humiliation, contrition, and brokenness of heart for the sin of which they had been guilty. Without doubt, he naturally inferred, from all that had passed between himself and his brethren, that they had persevered in their concealment from their father of the manner in which they had dealt with him. He saw at once that this was perpetuating the evil; that they who had robbed him of his home were depriving their father of any hope a real statement of the facts of the case might lead him to cherish, that his

long-lost son was still alive, and that possibly he might once more behold him.

This concealment, therefore, as we have before intimated, was to teach us this most important and practical lesson, that the more we connive at sin, or seek to conceal it, the greater our discomfort, and the severer the discipline which is ultimately to lead to a candid acknowledgment of it.

But now that Joseph had secured his object—this free confession of sin upon the part of his brethren, coupled with so importunate and touching an appeal—he can no longer forbear. He must declare himself. Hence we read, in the opening of the 45th chapter: “Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph: doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land; and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you

to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now, it was not you that sent me hither, but God : and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt : come down unto me, tarry not. And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast : and there will I nourish thee ; (for yet there are five years of famine,) lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen ; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept ; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover, he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them : and after that his brethren talked with him."

Reader, conceive, if you can, of this most affecting scene. To read it without tears is almost an impossibility. Well might his brethren first *wonder*, and then *weep* : first they *tremble*, then they *triumph*. He is their brother ; and, though once an offended and a greatly-injured one, yet now their forgiving and their exalted one. He testifies of their *folly*, but in the same breath of his *forgiveness* ; and, in

the midst of all, recognizes and proclaims the good and gracious hand of Him who had mysteriously but most mercifully sent him forward for the express purpose of preserving life. And now, how intensely anxious he that his father should know it—that his father should realize and enjoy it. “Tell *my* father [not merely *your* father, or “the old man of whom ye spake” now, but] tell *my* father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen ; and ye shall haste, and bring down *my* father hither.”

Oh, reader, touching as this scene is, it does but feebly represent what the relief, and what the peace, and what the enjoyment of a poor sinner, when the greater than Joseph pronounces his sins past, present, and to come, atoned for—blotted out—each and all forgiven. Doubtless the relief was inexpressible to Joseph’s brethren, when that which had hung upon their heart and consciences for years was, as far as he was concerned, forgiven ; but what comparison can such an act upon the part of Joseph bear to that which Jesus does when He declareth to the poor, trembling, conscience-smitten sinner, “I have put away thy sin, thou shalt not die ;” “I have blotted out thy sins as a cloud, and thine iniquities as a thick cloud ;” “I have cast all thy sins behind my back into the depths of the sea ; and when sought for, there shall be none ;” yea, when such forgiven men shall be brought, not into Goshen merely, but exalted to a participation with Him in all the glories and the triumphs of His throne ? For He will “present unto Himself (His redeemed and His

forgiven ones) a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing." "They are complete in Him." "Thou art all fair, my love," He says; "there is no spot in thee." "Thou art comely with the comeliness which I have put upon thee." "They shall walk with Him in white, for they are worthy"—made worthy in the worthiness of the Lamb.

Reader, do you know anything of these distinguishing mercies, personally and experimentally? and can you say—

"Now free from sin, I walk at large;
This Breaker's blood's my soul's discharge;
At His dear feet asham'd I lay,
A sinner saved, and homage pay?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BRETHREN'S DISTRESS—JOSEPH'S DECLARATION OF HIMSELF—
HIS PITY AND FORGIVENESS SO LIKE THAT OF JESUS—THE
BLESSED EFFECTS OF DIVINE PARDON—HART'S DESCRIPTION
THEREOF IN HIS OWN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE—THE SAINT'S
PRIVILEGED POSITION—CHRIST'S TENDERNESS WITH HIS DIS-
CIPLES—APPEAL TO THE READER—JOSEPH'S CAUTION TO HIS
BRETHREN ON THEIR RETURN TO CANAAN—JACOB'S AMAZEMENT
AND GRATITUDE.

As this work has already exceeded our intended limits, we must hasten to a conclusion. From the statement of Judah, at the close of the previous chapter, it is evident that Joseph's brethren were brought down to the very lowest point of anguish and excitement; and now, seeing at once their perplexity and their sorrow, Joseph can no longer refrain himself. Hence, having caused all but his brethren to withdraw from his presence, he, in proof of the intensity of his affection, bursts into tears. He "wept aloud;" or, as the margin renders it, he "gave forth his voice in weeping." He could no longer forbear; and yet, whilst expressing himself, he was overcome with tears of mingled joy and sorrow—joy in the review of all that Jehovah had been to

him and done for him; sorrow in the contemplation of the misery and the anguish which sin entails. "I am Joseph!" he exclaims; and then, as though anxious to be reassured, he impatiently adds, "Doth my father yet live?" "His brethren," we are told, "could not answer him," so "troubled" (or, margin, "terrified") were they at his presence. They were utterly at a loss to understand him, or to comprehend their position—so great and so rapid was the transition from one moment being apparently doomed ones to destruction, to a sudden declaration of an interest and a relationship the most unsuspected and least thought of. Whilst thus, as it were, stunned and affrighted, and the subjects of intense amazement, Joseph again speaks: "Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt." Thus every word told: the mention of their very sin only led the clearer to identification. The secret they had sought so long and so ingeniously to conceal, was now out, and by it—so wise and judicious was the ordering—they were reassured. How like this is the position of the poor sinner to whom Jesus speaks forgiveness:

"Thus whilst His death my sin displays
 In all its blackest hue,
 Such is the mystery of grace,
 It seals my pardon too."

Oh, who can describe what the emotions of a poor sinner, upon whose conscience, it may be, for years and years has hung the weight of sin, and the

dreadful dread of punishment, being of a sudden not only promised forgiveness, fully, and freely, and for ever, but also declared to be in blessed and unalienable relationship with Him who has personally borne the guilt, and endured in His own divine person the entire condemnation? Perfectly indescribable are the blessed effects of this gracious assurance. Human thought is too poor to conceive, and its language far, far too contracted to depict, the richness and the fulness and the intense blessedness of this experience. Hart, in his description of this interview with a sin-forgiving Jesus, comes nearest, we had almost said, of any human author, to what the Apostle means by his being caught up into the third heaven, and whether in the body, or out of the body, could not tell :—

“ But O the goodness of our God !
What pity melts His tender heart !
He saw me weltring in my blood,
And came and eas'd me of my smart.

“ While I was yet a great way off,
He ran, and on my neck He fell ;
My short distress He judg'd enough,
And snatch'd me from the brink of hell.

“ What an amazing change was here !
I look'd for hell ; He brought me heav'n.
' Cheer up,' said He ; ' dismiss thy fear ;
Cheer up ; thy sins are all forgiv'n.'

“ I would object ; but faster much
He answer'd, ' Peace.' ' What me ?' ' Yes, thee.'
But my enormous crimes are such——'
' I give thee pardon full and free.'

“ ‘But for the future, Lord’——‘I am
Thy great Salvation, perfect, whole;
Behold, thy bad works shall not damn,
Nor can thy good works save thy soul.

“ ‘Renounce them both. Myself alone
Will *for* thee work, and *in* thee too.
Henceforth I make thy cause my own,
And undertake to bring thee through.’

“ He said. I took the full release;
The Lord had signed it with His blood!
My horrors fled; and perfect peace,
And joy unspeakable, ensu’d.”

How sweet, too, the communings of Joseph with his brethren. Having declared himself, he then opens out facts, and reveals purposes, and gives assurances. How like Jesus in His dealings with His brethren! Oh that they knew more of the blessedness of intimacy with Him—sweet fellowship and endearing communion. It is ours, brethren, if we did but know it more fully, to be admitted unto and more thoroughly to realize and enjoy what the loved disciples experienced on their way to Emmaus, when Jesus drew nigh and went with them, “and beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Hence these disciples afterwards exclaimed, as well they might, “Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?”

Reader, do you know anything of this “burning of heart” of which the disciples spoke? Have you experienced that sweet calm, that precious peace,

that Christ-endearing glow of love, and warmth, and holy, heaven-aspiring desires which the world can neither give nor take away? Oh, what blessed seasons these! How fear-assuaging, peace-infusing, world-vanquishing, sin-subduing, Satan-resisting! Under its sweet influences, the soul can sing with the poet just now quoted—

“ When Jesus with His mighty love
Visits my troubled breast,
My fears subside, my doubts remove,
And I'm completely blest.

“ I love the Lord with mind and heart,
His people and His ways;
Envy, and pride, and lust depart;
And all His works I praise.”

If one did not know something of the human heart, in its treachery and ingratitude, one would be ready to suppose that the caution Joseph gave his brethren, “See that ye fall not out by the way,” was unnecessary. One would naturally have imagined, that that entirely-changed state of things to which they had been introduced, and the joyful mission upon which they were despatched, would have been ample security against any dispute or contention; but, no; Joseph knew their liability to jealousy or disaffection of some sort. And so is it with the people of God: they are mostly open to ensnarement when most highly favoured or privileged of God, as far as His smiles in providence or grace are concerned. Then it is that Satan is most envious, and most on the alert to entrap or ensnare.

What a scene must that have been, when, after having accomplished the journey from Egypt to Canaan, the brethren of Joseph drew nigh their father's house, and, crowding around him upon their arrival, they all, as with one voice, rapturously exclaimed, "Joseph is yet alive, and is governor over all the land of Egypt!" Well might Jacob's heart faint, "for he believed them not." So vast was the change—so great the contrast—that the news seemed indeed too good to be true. "Joseph, my long-lost one, alive? Impossible!" would poor unbelieving nature say. But, ah! "is anything too hard for the Lord?" Is it not His delight—and has it not ever been so—

"To raise our spirit when it faints,
And far exceed our hope?"

Speaking after the manner of men, the Lord is not only as good as His word, but commonly better than His word; that is, in His gracious dealings, and in the loving developments of His eternal love and mercy, He far exceeds the utmost expectations and even most boundless desires of His people. Our glorious Christ brings His beloved ones to say for themselves concerning Him what the queen of Sheba said in regard to Solomon, "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes have seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy

men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice."

Reader, is this *your* testimony? Can you say respecting the King in His beauty, and the land that seems so very far off, that "*The half was not told you?*" And, if it be so, amid all the corruptions within, and the entanglements and ensnarements without, what will it be when we are unrobed—disencumbered—have dropped in the grave the sinful occupant of these clay tabernacles, and behold "no more as through a glass darkly, but face to face," Him whom even now "having not seen we love, and whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory?"

"Oh, glorious hour! oh, bless'd abode!
We shall be near, and like our God;
Nor flesh, nor sense, shall more control
The sacred pleasures of the soul."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"IT IS ENOUGH"—"HE HATH DONE ALL THINGS WELL"—THE UNIVERSAL TESTIMONY OF THE REDEEMED—THE SECURITY OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE—THE LORD CONDUCTING BUT NOT COMMUNING—THE PRECIOUS "FEAR NOT" TO JACOB—THE PATRIARCH'S INTERVIEW WITH PHARAOH—THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HIS UNPROFITABLENESS EMBLEMATIC OF THE EXPERIENCE OF EVERY SPIRIT-TAUGHT SOUL—THE HUMBLING EFFECTS ATTENDANT UPON RETRACING THE PILGRIM PATHWAY—THE PATRIARCH'S DYING TESTIMONY—APPEAL TO THE READER.

"It is enough," said Israel, when he saw the waggons which his long-lost one had sent to carry him; "Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die."

Thus spake the patriarch, after his many years' conflict, and after all the cares and exercises of which he had been the subject; and in like manner does each and every one of the Lord's family testify to His goodness, His mercy, His divine faithfulness. Whatever may have been the changes through which they were called to pass—whatever the vicissitudes with which they had been familiar—however severe for the time being the discipline to which they had been subject—their dying testimony is sure to be, "It is enough;" "He hath done all things well."

Each and every affliction, loss or cross, trial or temptation, leads on and on to this blessed summing up of the whole earthly career: "It is enough;" "He hath led me by *the right* way [though at times apparently so crooked and perverse] that I may go to a city of habitation." Hence, in the confidence of faith, every child of God may sing, even in the midst of his conflicts and trials—

"Yes, I to the end shall endure,
As sure as the earnest is given;
More happy, but not more secure,
The glorified spirits in heaven."

As is so commonly the case in the believer's experience, God, who had for a season stood aloof from Jacob as to manifestation, and merely dealt with him in a way of providence, now draws near to him, and communes with his spirit. Reader, do *you* understand the distinction? "Do you know what it is sometimes to be *led*, but led in *silence*—no word—no love-look—no sweet intimation, "I am with thee—fear not, 'tis I;" and yet, at the same time, led on—prompted to go forward—no other course open—but still withal a blank, because there is the want of word—the lack of a feeling of blessed companionship—the seeming to be guided by sense, or as a mere matter of course, rather than by the Lord's own special and gracious hand? Hence how blessed when He comes in, it may be unexpectedly, but oh, so timely and so graciously, with His "Fear not to go down into Egypt." What is the soul's instantaneous response, but—

“Cheerful where'er Thy hand shall lead,
The darkest paths I'll tread;
And joyful quit these mortal shores,
To mingle with the dead.”

“Fear not to go down into Egypt,” said Jehovah to Jacob, “for I will there make of thee a great nation. I will go down with thee into Egypt [oh, how condescending and how gracious]; and I will surely bring thee up again; and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.”

Reader, permit us to say, in passing, that whatever Jehovah promises that He does. No obstacle can prevent the fulfilment of His purpose—no barrier divert Him from His course :

“All must come, and last, and end,
As shall please our heavenly Friend.”

“And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while.” What a touching scene must this have been. How marvellous the contrast between the parting with Joseph when sent by his father to see how his brethren fared, and this meeting with him, after being made governor over all the land of Egypt: then a mere errand boy, now next in dignity and position to the king upon the throne. Reader, what a God is our God!

“And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.”

Jacob's interview with Pharaoh, whilst most interesting, is at the same time fraught with instruction: "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh."

Who of us, reader, in looking back, if we know anything of divine teaching, and of the heart's treachery and defilement, but must say, as the patriarch did, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been?" Oh, who of us, in retracing the pathway, but must, as far as we are personally concerned, contemplate it with shame and sorrow, and the utmost possible dissatisfaction? What waste of time and talent! How vast the sacrifice of power, and energy, and means, which, if properly directed, might (humanly speaking) have been productive of such totally different results, both as far as ourselves and others were concerned. Who, whilst thus viewing matters, but must be filled with the greatest self-loathing and abhorrence? and what would such views produce but absolute despair, but for that precious fountain of love, and blood, and salvation to which one gladly flees afresh for cleansing and consolation? Where shall we find shelter and satis-

faction but in His wounded side and in His dear sympathizing heart, who, prepared for the weakness, and the waywardness, and the wretchedness of His redeemed, testified, "I knew that thou wouldst be called a transgressor from the womb?" Well may each such saved one exclaim—

"Ere He called me, well He knew
What a heart like mine would do."

Another touching period of the patriarch's most eventful life is that when, having been summoned to his dying bed, Joseph stood beside him with his two sons. The terms in which the closing of his days are introduced are very striking: "And the time drew nigh that Israel must die."

Reader, although we may not now be aware of it, how very appropriate may this language be to ourselves. Its bearing upon our position may be somewhat delayed, but at farthest it cannot be long; possibly it may have the most direct reference to the writer or the reader: "The time drew nigh that [he] must die." Reader, are you ready? Does the thought affright or cheer? Are you prepared to surrender? Has the world so little hold upon your heart, and are your affections so loosened to time and time-things, that you can sing—

"Welcome, bless'd hour of full discharge,
That sets my longing soul at large,
Unbinds my chains, breaks up my cell,
And bids me with my God to dwell?"

"And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought

to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed." "And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

No less affecting was the scene when, having specially blessed Joseph and his sons, "Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days;" and then, after having addressed them one by one, and in the midst of blessing them exclaimed, in the fulness of his heart, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord," we read, that when he had "made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into his bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people."

Reader, may the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob be manifestly the God both of writer and reader, to "guide us with His counsel here, and afterwards receive us to glory." Amen and amen.

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